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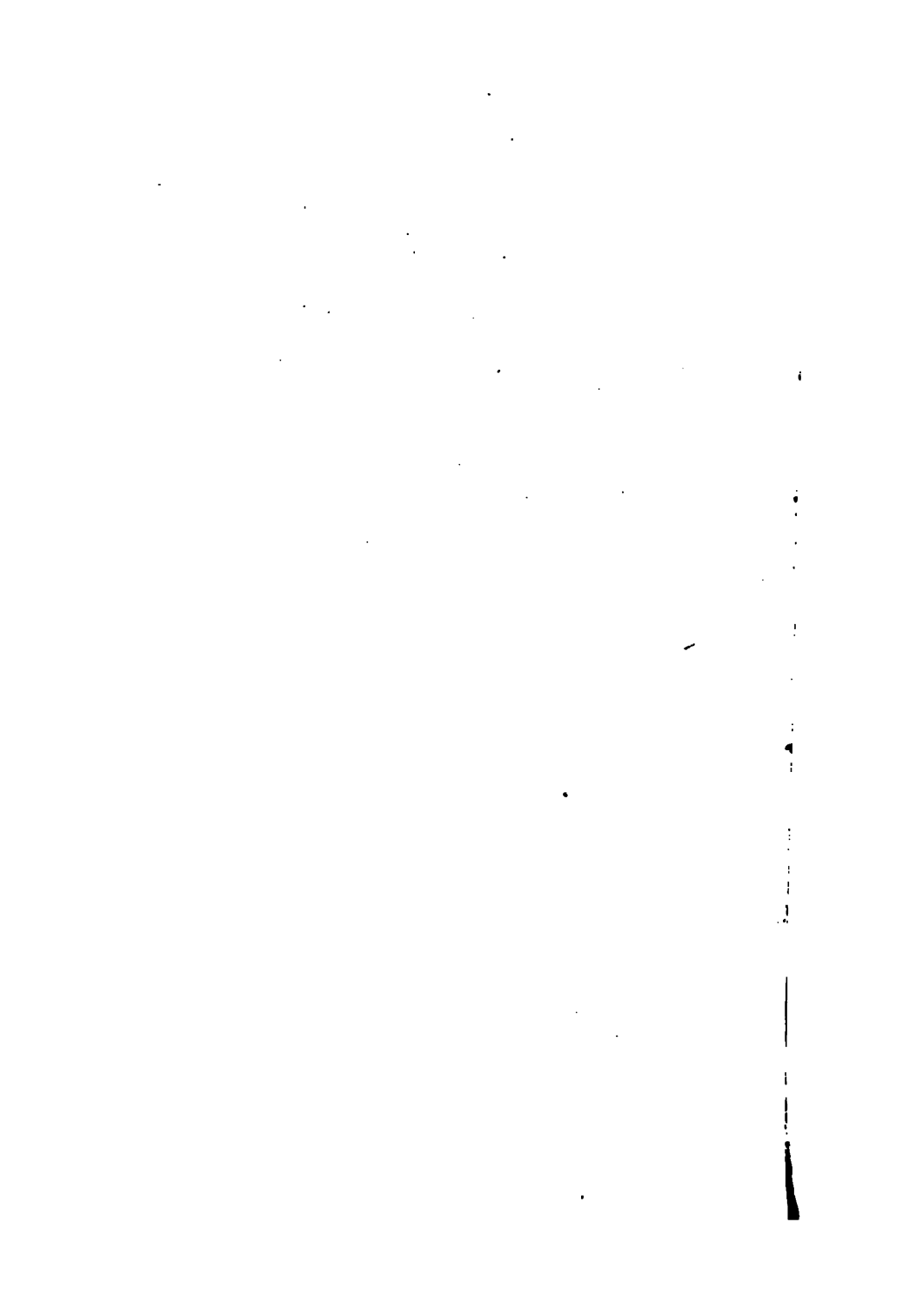


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**HIS EXCELLENCY'S ENGLISH
GOVERNESS**

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His Excellency's
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By

SYDNEY C. GRIER-

AUTHOR OF "A CROWNED QUEEN,"
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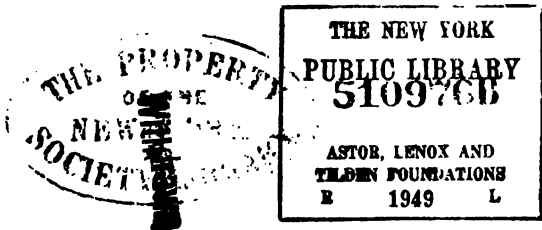
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HIS EXCELLENCY'S ENGLISH GOVERNESS

CHAPTER I.

A GIRL GRADUATE.

It was Presentation-day at the University of London. The date was somewhere in the latter half of the present century,—not this year, nor last year, nor the year before that, when you, dear reader, or your brother or cousin, may have graced the scene in cap and gown—but so long ago that the graduates and undergraduates of to-day were still in the nursery taking practical lessons as to the value of tactual perception, or forcing an undesired entrance into the realms of knowledge by way of the spelling-book and the Latin Primer. The day was a lovely one in May, and the spring sunshine poured in through the high windows of the theatre on the Chancellor in his Court suit and gold-embroidered gown, on the members of the Senate in their crimson and scarlet robes, and on the reporters scribbling away

for dear life at their table. There was the usual throng of admiring friends and relations in the gallery and the back seats, and the usual inner semicircle of presentees, looking like a bed of gorgeous and not always harmonious flowers, from the vivid colours of their gowns and hoods. A modern observer would have noted only one point of marked difference from a similar scene to-day, and this was the absence of the serried ranks of lady graduates. There were only two or three women to be presented, and they looked pale and nervous, but dauntlessly resolved to do their duty to the end. In those days it was an achievement to gain possession of a London degree, and these girls felt that the eyes of England and of the world were upon them. They were conscious also of furnishing the sensation of the day, for a woman had obtained the prize for French in the B.A. Final, and the second place in Honours for Mental and Moral Science, for the first time on record, and the friends of female education were jubilant. Miss Arbuthnot, the principal of the South Central High School, in which Cecil Anstruther had received her education, looked fully two inches taller than usual as she led her pupil up to the Chancellor's dais, and the little knot of friends and teachers in the gallery applauded frantically, while even the men who had been ignominiously left behind in the race were magnanimous enough to do their share of clapping. The parliamentary representative of the University referred especially to Miss Anstruther in his regulation speech, and the noble Chancellor himself pressed her hand and congratulated her with even more than his ordinary paternal suavity of manner. As for Cecil's own feelings, she was so much embarrassed by the cheering, the publicity, and the difficulty of carrying

her cap, her diploma, and her prize, and finding a hand to give the Chancellor at the same time, that she did not breathe freely until she was safely back in her seat, with her companions in misfortune eagerly inspecting her new possessions.

A little later, and the grand function was over. The Chancellor and the members of the Senate had filed off solemnly, like the chorus of a Greek play, the reporters had closed their note-books and decamped with much less ceremony, and the theatre was deserted, save by a few presentees who were displaying their medals and diplomas to impatient friends. Cecil paused at the door on her way to the robing-room with Miss Arbuthnot.

"I'm quite sorry to say good-bye to the dear old place," she said; "I have been here for the Matriculation, the Intermediate, and the B.A., and now again to-day, and I know the pattern of the ceiling and all the mouldings on the walls by heart."

"I only wish you would come here again for the M.A. and the D.Lit.," said Miss Arbuthnot. "That is my one sorrow with regard to you, Cecil, that you are ending your academical course at this point."

"But, you see, I have really no choice," said Cecil. "The children at home are getting older, and I must either teach them myself or earn money to help with their education. And you know, Miss Arbuthnot, I do so much dread going among strangers, and I want to stay at home if I possibly can. If I could have got a post in the School, of course——"

"That would not be good enough," replied Miss Arbuthnot with decision. "Public opinion has yet to be roused on the subject of High School teachers' salaries. No, Cecil, what I should like for you would

be something quite different. As for teaching your little brothers and sisters, I believe it is a task at once beyond and beneath your powers. You are much better fitted to instruct older children, and you are not at all suited to cope with very naughty ones, such as I understand them to be. I can't prophesy success for you."

"But what could I do?" asked Cecil.

"I think you should try for a post as finishing governess in some good family, where you would be properly treated," said Miss Arbuthnot. "Abroad, perhaps; I believe the Russians treat their governesses very well. You are not a specialist, Cecil—that is another thing I regret, you would have gained the University scholarship for Mental and Moral Science if you had been—but you are good all round. Well, we mustn't stay talking here. I will see you to Victoria, and then I must hurry back to the School. Only remember, if you do not succeed with the children, let me know. I am often asked to recommend thoroughly first-class governesses, and I will do my best for you, dear child."

Miss Arbuthnot's voice trembled a little as she concluded, for she had grown very fond of her head pupil, and honestly believed that she could have done anything she liked in the way of passing examinations. It had been a great pleasure to the elder lady to have this ardent young disciple always at hand, to sympathise with her plans and to become imbued with her views, nor was Miss Arbuthnot at all unmindful of the honour reflected on the School by the girl's success. The cause of female education in general, and the South Central High School in particular, were the objects to which Miss Arbuthnot's life was

devoted, and the cause gained no small lustre from the ovation Cecil had received at the Presentation, and the comments which had been made thereon in the various speeches, and which might be looked for from the Press.

The principal's expectations in this respect were not disappointed. The London dailies remarked on Cecil's success in a style half-flattering, half-contemptuous, and at greater or less length according to their interest in the subject, and the country papers took up the strain, and carried it on in their several ways. In particular, the 'Whitcliffe Argus,' the chief organ of Cecil's native place, devoted nearly half a column to setting forth, rather late in the day, in a dialect of journalese peculiarly its own, the honours gained by the "daughter of our esteemed fellow-townsmen the much respected Vicar of St Barnabas'." The paper was pounced upon, and the paragraph read aloud in a stentorian voice by one of Cecil's younger brothers, a particularly rampant specimen of that troublesome race, when the 'Argus' was delivered at St Barnabas' Vicarage. No subject had been further from Cecil's mind as she sat at the head of the dinner-table, with flushed cheeks and rather dishevelled hair, and a worried look which contrasted sadly with the hopeful aspect she had worn when she bade farewell to Miss Arbuthnot little more than a month before. Mrs Anstruther was away on a visit, and to Cecil had fallen a task sufficient to appal the stoutest heart, that of keeping in order the seven small half-brothers and sisters who sat round the table, and whom no one but their own genial, boisterous Irish mother had ever succeeded in managing.

The Anstruther children were the terror of Whit-

cliffe. Their mother said that they had excellent hearts, and this was very possibly true, but it was also painfully evident that they had no manners, and a very small amount of conscience. Add to this the possession of tremendous animal spirits, splendid lungs, and most inventive brains, and it will be seen that the life of a conscientious elder sister, who held pronounced views of her own on the subject of education, was not likely to be an easy one among them. Of all those who tried to govern them Cecil was perhaps the least successful, for she was gentle, methodical, and somewhat old-maidish in her ways, and each of these tendencies militated strongly against her. She got on very well with Mrs Anstruther (indeed, no one who knew that stout, untidy little lady, with her blue-grey eyes and her soft, drawling brogue, could do otherwise), and loved her almost as much as if she had been her own mother, but the children did not take to her. Even now, after a morning spent in wild efforts to clear away the things they left about, undo the mischief they had done, and efface generally the traces of their baleful existence, she could not eat her dinner in peace. Patsy was spilling his pudding on the carpet, Loey feeding the cat from his plate, and when Cecil leaned across the table to rescue Eily's glass of water from imminent peril of destruction, Terry seized the opportunity of pulling out all her hair-pins. And all this time Fitz was roaring out the paragraph from the 'Argus' in his loudest tones.

"Fitzgerald!" came in a stern voice from the lower end of the table, where sat Mr Anstruther, with a book propped up against the dish in front of him; "don't make that noise. Why don't you keep the children quiet, Cecil? My dear!" and Mr Anstruther's

eye-glasses went slowly up, to be focussed on Cecil's dishevelled tresses, "what have you been doing to your hair? It is in a most disgraceful state. What is all this row about?"

"Why, daddy," cried Loey, otherwise Owen, "it's what we'll do with Cissie's money we're talking about."

"You will do nothing with it," returned Mr Anstruther, severely, for the point was rather a sore one with him. "Your sister will spend the money as she likes, without consulting a set of little dunces like you."

"Oh, papa, but I mean to do something for them," cried Cecil. "I have been so glad ever since I heard I had got the prize to think that I should be able to help you with it. The money will pay the boys' fees for one term, or help with their books, at any rate."

"You are very good, my dear child, in wishing to be of use, but what can fifteen pounds do towards educating four boys, who have not brains enough among them all to get a ten-pound scholarship, nor steadiness and sense of honour enough to go to and from the Grammar-School like gentlemen? What with their school-fees, and the bills I have to pay for the damage they do, it needs a millionaire to look after them."

And Mr Anstruther rose abruptly from his seat, said grace, and departed to his study. It was a constant disappointment to him that only his eldest daughter had inherited his own scholarly tastes, and that his younger children, although dowered with their mother's splendid bodily health, had inherited also her distaste for steady mental work. Sometimes the disparity made him a little unjust to Cecil, as if his disappointment were her fault, and the sense of this struck her to-day

so keenly that, worn-out and discouraged, she pushed back her chair from the table and burst into tears. The children stood around in impotent alarm; then, their consciences no doubt pricking them, one after another crept softly from the room. For a little while Cecil sobbed hopelessly; then a sudden resolution came to her, and she started up. Miss Arbuthnot's words had returned to her memory, and she saw that if she could not be useful with the children at home, she might at any rate help to provide the money necessary to give them the education they so greatly needed. With ferocious haste she twisted her soft auburn hair into a rough knot, secured it by sticking in the pins in handfuls, and dashed away the tears from her brown eyes, now blurred and piteous with crying. Without giving herself time to repent, she sat down at the writing-table in the window, and began to write. The chair and table shook with her sobs as she did so, but she scrambled through her letter as fast as she could, sealed and stamped it, and then, snatching up her hat, rushed across the road to the pillar-box with the important missive, determined not to trust any of the boys.

All this afternoon Cecil, to use Biblical language, "went softly in the bitterness of her soul," for the step she had just taken marked the downfall of many hopes. Throughout her school career, which had cost her father very little, owing to the number of prizes and scholarships she had won, her aim had been to make use of her knowledge in instructing her half-brothers and sisters. Recollections of past failure in holiday-times had not deterred her from setting to work again with enthusiasm, but after rather less than a month's trial she was compelled to admit that the

result was unsatisfactory. She knew that under ordinary circumstances she was an interesting teacher and a good disciplinarian,—experience in teaching classes at the South Central School had assured her of this,—and she had not reckoned on the opposing influence which was to render all her efforts nugatory. The children were the only subject on which Mrs Anstruther and Cecil were gravely divided in opinion, but on this one point they differed exceedingly. Mrs Anstruther insisted that Cecil was trying to break the children's spirits, and she made it her business to rescue them from this untoward fate on every possible occasion. Derided by her pupils and unsupported by their mother, her rules set aside, and her punishments continually remitted, it is little wonder that Cecil decided to give up the contest in despair. There seemed to be something in her that aroused all the wickedness of which the children were capable; and only this morning a final touch had been put to her misery by a remark of her father's, to the effect that he wished Cecil would leave her brothers and sisters alone, for they were always far worse with her than with any one else. That Mr Anstruther should say this was the most unkindest cut of all, and Cecil felt that her last support in the home was gone.

The next morning, just as breakfast was over at St Barnabas' Vicarage, great excitement was caused among the children by the sight of a telegraph-boy coming up to the house. Six of them met him at the door, and conveyed the missive in triumph to Cecil, to whom it was addressed, offering meanwhile various suggestions as to the nature of the contents. It was with some difficulty that she succeeded in rescuing the envelope untorn, and in acquainting herself with the message.

"M. ARBUTHNOT to C. ANSTRUTHER.

"Come to me at once for two or three days. Have heard of something for you."

Cecil read the words in astonishment, with all the children dancing and yelling round her like wild Indians. They were still in the hall, and Cecil was too much engrossed by the telegram to try to calm them, until the study door opened, and her father's tired face looked out.

"Really, Cecil," he began, "I think, when you know I am preparing my sermon, you might——" But his voice was drowned by the children.

"Daddy, Cissie's got a telegram. We wouldn't go to school until she would tell us what it was. She's going to London, isn't she?"

"What does all this mean, Cecil?" asked Mr Anstruther, wearily, and his daughter put the telegram into his hand.

"Well," he said, when he had read it, "you have asked Miss Arbuthnot to find you a situation, I suppose? After all, perhaps it is the best thing you can do."

"And you must let me help with the boys then, papa," said Cecil, eagerly. "I think I am pretty sure to get a good salary, you know, and I can take one of them, at any rate, off your hands."

"Very well, my dear. It is impossible not to feel grateful for such a proposal. Patrick, leave off teasing that cat, and go to school with your brothers. If you can get your things ready for the 11.55 train, Cecil, I will walk down to the station with you."

Cecil dashed up-stairs, and spent the next hour in wild efforts to get her box packed, which was a work

of difficulty, with Eily, Norah, and Geraldine standing around, advising, touching, criticising, meddling in a way that nearly drove her mad. Happily Mrs Anstruther was to return before lunch, and she therefore felt less compunction than she would otherwise have done in leaving her flock to their own devices. By dint of superhuman exertion she managed to be ready by the appointed time, and kissed the children all round, admonished them not to quarrel, rushed into the nursery to remind the nurse to put on their clean pinafores before their mother's return, and gave hasty parting directions about lunch to the cook. Then there was a hurried walk down to the station, in which she endeavoured vainly to keep up with her father's long strides, and a brief farewell on the platform. Cecil shook hands with Mr Anstruther (he had an invincible objection to being kissed in public, principally owing to the fact that his wife and younger children were especially given to the practice), and he put her into a ladies' carriage just as the train was about to start.

Leaning back in her place, Cecil spent her time during the journey in speculations as to the situation found for her. Was she to be principal of some newly-founded High School, where the extent and freshness of her acquirements would counterbalance the defects of her youth and comparative inexperience? Or was she to be governess in a private family, possibly on the Continent, possibly in some stately English home, where she would be treated with frigid courtesy, and shunned and criticised as a "learned lady"? She sighed as she revolved these possibilities in her mind, and wished once more that she might have remained at home. But regrets were vain, the train was nearing Victoria, and on the platform stood Miss Arbuthnot, to whom

Mr Anstruther had telegraphed from Whitcliffe that Cecil was on her way.

"I am glad you have come at once, Cecil," she said, as they left the station in a cab, "for I can give you a rare treat for to-night. What do you think of tickets for both of us for the *Conversazione* at Burlington House, to meet all the great people?"

"How splendid!" cried Cecil, with sparkling eyes. "And the situation, Miss Arbuthnot?"

"Oh—ah—the situation. Of course that is the chief thing, after all. Well, you and I are to meet the lady and gentleman at Daridge's Hotel to-morrow, and lunch with them afterwards."

"Oh, then it is a private family?" asked Cecil.

"Private? Oh, well—yes. Not a school at all."

Miss Arbuthnot seemed not to wish to say anything more, but presently she began to question Cecil as to her dress for the evening, betraying a solicitude as to her appearance which surprised the girl.

"Of course, I ought to have told you to bring your best evening gown," she said, "but I never thought of it, and it would have been rather awkward to mention it in a telegram. What have you? the black velvet with your mother's lace? It is rather old for you, but after all that is no drawback. You see, Cecil," smiling at her pupil's puzzled face, "we are all very proud of you. You have done the School great credit, and I should not wonder if you were to find yourself a little bit of a celebrity in a small way to-night. So you see why I want you to look well, that you may uphold the honour of the South Central."

CHAPTER II.

"THERE WAS A SOUND OF REVELRY BY NIGHT."

MISS ARBUTHNOT'S well - meant solicitude had the effect of making Cecil very nervous as the evening approached, and at last she actually entreated to be allowed to stay behind at the School and spend a quiet hour or two with the governesses, instead of going to Burlington House. But Miss Arbuthnot would not hear of this, and insisted on supervising her dressing personally, almost hustling her into the carriage at last.

"Nonsense, my dear, nonsense!" she said, vigorously, when they were fairly started. "You really must get rid of this foolish timidity, or you will be fit for nothing. I should have been seriously displeased if you had not come. Not only would it have been very rude, for it is a great favour to get a ticket, but there are several people I want you to see, a very old friend of mine for one. You have heard me speak of Elma Wargrave?"

"One of the pioneers?" asked Cecil.

In Miss Arbuthnot's circle the early workers in the cause of female education were always designated by this respectful term.

"Yes, I see you know whom I mean. She and I were great friends when we were girls, and we had almost decided to start school-keeping together. She was most enthusiastic about it, and used to talk of the joy of devoting her whole life absolutely to the great work. But, unfortunately, she went to stay with some relations, and while with them she fell in with a young Scotch soldier, Sir Dugald Haigh. He was ridiculously poor, for his father had spent everything he could lay his hands on, and mortgaged the estates, so that Sir Dugald had scarcely more than his Artillery pay upon which to support an empty title and two people. But Elma married him and went out to India at once, and she has travelled about with him ever since in all sorts of outlandish places and horrible climates. I believe they have been very happy, and Sir Dugald is high in the Service, and has lately been made Consul-General and political agent at Baghdad, so I suppose they are not pinched any longer now. I don't grudge them their happiness, my dear," added Miss Arbuthnot, slowly, "but I have never been able to help regretting that Elma should have given up such a work for the sake of that very ordinary little man."

"I am quite anxious to see them," said Cecil. "Is Sir Dugald in England as well as Lady Haigh?"

"No, she is here alone. Some trouble broke out in the country just as they were starting, and Sir Dugald would not take his furlough. But here we are. Now, my dear child, forget yourself, and think of the people you will see."

In spite of this excellent advice, Cecil still felt very nervous when they had laid aside their wraps and she was following Miss Arbuthnot's sweeping satin train

up the steps and into the crowded and brightly lighted rooms of the Academy. She did not know that she made a very pretty picture herself, with her fresh colouring and coils of bright hair set off by the black velvet dress, with its deep cuffs and standing collar of old lace, but Miss Arbuthnot perceived this and rejoiced to know it, not caring at all that her own plain, sensible face, adorned with the inevitable *pince-nez*, formed an excellent foil for Cecil's girlish charms.

At first Cecil wanted to stand aside in some quiet corner, and watch the throng of noted people moving about, and learn all their names, but Miss Arbuthnot was a celebrity herself, and was, moreover, a woman of many acquaintances, who had all some kind or complimentary word for her young companion, when they recognised her or heard who she was. Still, it seemed to Cecil that her friend was watching anxiously for some one who had not yet appeared, and that she was manifestly relieved when a stout elderly lady, chiefly remarkable for the possession of a very prominent set of teeth, made her way through the crowd and joined them, greeting Miss Arbuthnot with effusion, and turning an expansive smile on Cecil.

"And this must be our young friend the lady graduate," she said, looking at her kindly. "You must introduce us, Marian. I should like a talk with Miss Anstruther."

"Cecil," said Miss Arbuthnot, rather nervously, "I want to introduce you to Lady Haigh. We were speaking about her just now."

Cecil was nothing loth to make acquaintance with the lady who had given up so much for the sake of her young Scotch soldier, and whose defection Miss Arbuthnot still mourned so bitterly, and she acquiesced

at once when Lady Haigh suggested that they should retire to a quiet palm-shaded seat among the statuary, and have a chat, while Miss Arbuthnot was taken possession of by a distinguished cleric who had also been one of the pioneers of the education movement. Lady Haigh proved to be as kind as she looked, and showed herself very much interested in Cecil's career. She asked as many questions as though she wanted to write her biography, and asked them, too, as if she were really interested in the answers, and not asking merely for politeness' sake. Then she inquired all about the girl's home circumstances, and learned all that Cecil would tell her about Mr and Mrs Anstruther and the rest of the family at St Barnabas' Vicarage, and then she changed the subject of the conversation abruptly, and began to talk about her own doings in Baghdad. It seemed to be a fairly pleasant life on the whole, and Lady Haigh showed herself by no means desirous of underrating its attractions.

"You see, my dear, although it is dreadfully decayed since the days of the Khalifs and the 'Arabian Nights,' yet it is a very interesting place still. The society is really not bad, for there are nearly always travellers or officers of some sort passing through, and they all come to the Residency. Then the assistant political agent comes up sometimes from Basra, and of course there are clerks and secretaries, but they are mostly Armenians or East Indians. There is generally a gunboat in the river, too, and when it is lying off the Residency we are really quite gay. Then there are the officials at the other consulates, but socially speaking, and between you and me, they are rather a dull set. But there are a few of the Jews and Armenians

in the place who are travelled and cultivated people, and quite friends of ours. Then, of course, it is very interesting when you get to know some of the Turkish ladies, and it is curious to study the mixture of nationalities in such a place as Baghdad. I often say that it reminds me of nothing so much as of Nuremberg or one of those German cities of the Middle Ages, at the time of their annual fairs."

"I should love to see it," said Cecil, drawing a long breath, "but I shall never be able to afford an Eastern trip until I am quite old. When the boys are all off my hands, I mean to save up, so that I can travel about wherever I like when I am an ancient spinster. It would scarcely do for me to go out now and set up a girls' High School under the shadow of the Residency, would it?"

"Scarcely," laughed Lady Haigh; "and I am afraid, too, you would hardly get pupils enough to make it pay, except possibly among the Greeks and Armenians. The Turkish ladies are kept very closely secluded, and although the Pasha is very anxious to do what he can to introduce European customs, yet he is not even backed up by his own harem."

"It must feel like being in the 'Arabian Nights' to live in Baghdad," said Cecil.

"Wouldn't you like to find out something about it from one of the natives?" asked Lady Haigh, indicating a tall, olive-complexioned gentleman a short distance off, clad in irreproachable evening-dress and a fez cap. "That is Denarien Bey, an Armenian gentleman whose family has lived in Baghdad for many generations. He is in England at present on some business for the Pasha, and would be delighted to tell you anything you wanted to know."

She beckoned with her fan, and Denarien Bey came forward with much alacrity. He bowed very politely when he was introduced, but Cecil fancied that she saw a start of dismay when he caught her name. She assured herself afterwards, however, that it must have been only fancy, for he was most attentive, answered all her questions about Baghdad, and escorted her to the buffet and catered for her as punctiliously as any Englishman. At last he took her back to Miss Arbuthnot, and the strange, delightful evening was over. Cecil passed the sleeping hours of that night in a wild whirl, in which visions of Baghdad in the golden prime of good Haroun-al-Raschid were peopled with the gorgeous throngs she had seen at Burlington House, and the President's bow and hand-shake had some occult connection with the black eyes and hooked nose of Denarien Bey, and with the diamonds and Indian embroidery of the "Mother of Teeth," as her Armenian friend had informed her that Lady Haigh was called in Baghdad. Towards morning she had a less extravagant dream, relating to the foundation of the High School she had laughingly proposed, and including the appearance of his Excellency Ahmed Khémi, Pasha-Governor of Baghdad, in full uniform and blazing with orders, to give away the prizes at the end of the first term. From this delightful vision Cecil was roused by a visit from Miss Arbuthnot, who came to her room to see whether she had overslept herself, and again displayed considerable interest in ascertaining what dress she intended to wear.

Breakfast over, and Miss Arbuthnot's modest victoria at the door to convey Cecil to meet her fate, the principal grew nervous again. Cecil was far more collected than she was, and got together her testimonials and

certificates with a calmness which was extremely creditable. At last they were ready to start, and, after what seemed a miraculously short drive, arrived at Daridge's Hotel. Cecil's courage was beginning to fail her now, and she felt her limbs trembling as she followed Miss Arbuthnot into the hall, and thence up the wide staircase, preceded by a peculiarly gorgeous domestic in livery. Presently this individual opened a door on one side of a lofty corridor, and ushered them into a room filled with gentlemen. Cecil caught Miss Arbuthnot's arm.

"This can't be the right room. He's taking us into a committee meeting by mistake," she whispered.

"No, my dear, it is all right," said Miss Arbuthnot, and marched on undauntedly, Cecil following, and experiencing something of the feeling which must have actuated Childe Roland when he came to the Dark Tower.

The gentlemen rose as they entered, and one of them, in whom Cecil recognised her last night's acquaintance, Denarien Bey, came to shake hands; while, to complete her mystification, she caught sight of Lady Haigh smiling and nodding at her from the other side of a long table. Denarien Bey placed chairs for the new arrivals—a proceeding which reminded Cecil forcibly of the words sometimes met with in the reports of trials, "the prisoner at the bar was accommodated with a seat,"—and then returned to his place, so that Cecil had time to look about her.

There were some eight or nine gentlemen present, the chief of whom seemed to be a grey-haired man at the end of the table. His face was in some way familiar to Cecil, but it was not at first that she remembered that she had seen him in close attendance on the

Turkish Ambassador on his way to some State function. Next to him, on either side, sat Lady Haigh and Denarien Bey, and then came several vivacious, dark-eyed gentlemen in fezzes, who talked among themselves with a great deal of gesticulation, and seemed to bear a kind of national likeness to the Armenian envoy. Somewhat apart from the rest sat a stout elderly Englishman, with a stolid and unconvinced expression, and a general air of being present to keep other people from being imposed upon. There was also a secretary—a slim, dark-skinned youth in spectacles, who scribbled notes in a large clasped book, when he was not nibbling his pen and staring at Cecil; and lastly, at the very end of the table, Cecil and Miss Arbuthnot themselves. Cecil was in a hopeless state of amazement and mystification, feeling, moreover, a terrible inclination to giggle on finding herself the cynosure of all the eyes in the room. What could it all mean? Was it possible that Ahmed Khémi Pasha, who was said to be fond of European innovations, was going to found a High School in Baghdad? and was she to take charge of it? But no; Miss Arbuthnot had said that the situation was to be in a private family. What could be going to happen?

There was a little low-toned conversation between the two gentlemen at the head of the table, and then Denarien Bey spoke.

"We have heard, mademoiselle, that you are willing to accept a situation as governess out of England—a course seldom adopted by young ladies of your high attainments. This suggested to her ladyship," he bowed to Lady Haigh, "and myself the idea that you might be found the proper person to undertake a charge of a very delicate and important nature. Before saying

more, I must impress upon you that all that passes here is in strict confidence, whether the result of this interview is satisfactory or the reverse."

Cecil bowed, and he went on—

"I think I shall scarcely be committing an indiscretion if I mention in the present company that his Excellency Ahmed Khémi Pasha, whom I have the honour to represent here, intends to make his third son, Azim Shams-ed-Din Bey, his heir. A cause may be found for this in the unsatisfactory character of his Excellency's eldest son; and there are also other family reasons which render it imperative. His Excellency has always felt a profound admiration for the English people, and this has of late so much increased that he is anxious to secure an English governess for the Bey, who is now about ten years old. As I was about to visit England, his Excellency thought fit to confide to me the duty of finding a lady with suitable qualifications who would be willing to accept the post, and I, feeling the charge too heavy for me, even with the kind and experienced help of her ladyship, have taken the precaution of associating with myself my good friend Tussûn Bey," here he bowed to the old gentleman at the head of the table, "and these other kind friends."

There was another interlude of bowing, and Denarien Bey continued—

"The special qualifications which his Excellency desired me to seek in the lady who is to have the charge of his son are these: she must be capable of carrying on and completing the Bey's education in all but strictly military subjects; she must be young and—and—well, not disagreeable-looking, that the Bey may feel inclined to learn from her; she must be discreet and not given

to making mischief; and she must have been trained in the best methods of teaching. May I trouble you, mademoiselle, to bring your testimonials to this end of the table?"

Somewhat surprised, Cecil rose and carried her bundle of papers to him, while the other gentlemen all turned round on their chairs to look at her, apparently to ascertain whether she fulfilled the second condition satisfactorily.

"I think, gentlemen," said Tussûn Bey in French, "that if Mademoiselle Antaza"—he made a bold attempt at the unmanageable name—"finds herself able to accept the situation, his Excellency will be much gratified by her appearance. She is thoroughly English."

"*Vraiment anglaise!*" ran down the table, as all the gentlemen gazed critically at the tall slight figure in the severely simple tweed dress and cloth jacket, with the small close hat and short veil crowning the smooth hair. Cecil returned blushing to her place, while Denarien Bey explained to his assessors the purport of the various testimonials; and the secretary, finding Miss Arbuthnot's eye upon him, made copious notes. After a time the papers were all returned to Denarien Bey, the gentlemen making remarks upon them in two or three strange-sounding dialects; and after receiving a paper from the secretary, the Pasha's representative proceeded to explain the terms which were offered.

The salary proposed was a large one, but the Pasha was anxious that his son's course of study should be uninterrupted, and it was therefore his endeavour to secure for it an unbroken period of five years by the following plan. Cecil was to sign an agreement, if her services were engaged, to serve for two years, and on

the expiration of this term she could, if she was willing, at once sign another bond to remain three years more, after which she was to be entitled to a large extra bonus in consideration of her labours in conducting Azim Bey's education to a successful close. If Cecil broke the agreement, she was to forfeit the salary for all but the time she had actually served; but if it was broken by the Pasha for any cause excepting her misconduct, the balance was to be paid to her. By the end of the five years Azim Bey would be fifteen, and old enough to be emancipated from female control, and Cecil might return to her own country after an uninterrupted absence of five years.

Cecil's heart sank as she listened. When she heard the amount of the salary offered, she had eagerly calculated what she could do for the boys with it, and the mention of the bonus raised high hopes in her heart, until she realised the conditions under which alone it was to be gained. Actually to expatriate herself for five whole years! Never to see England, or her father, or cheerful little Mrs Anstruther, or any of those dear dreadful children for five years! It was too appalling. She was on the point of rising and refusing the situation point-blank, but she found that Denarien Bey was speaking again.

"You will take until the day after to-morrow to consider this, mademoiselle. I will peruse carefully your testimonials, if you will be good enough to leave them with me; and if they prove satisfactory, as I have no doubt will be the case, and you decide to accept the terms offered by his Excellency, Lady Haigh's return to Baghdad to rejoin her husband will afford an excellent opportunity for your journey thither. This proposal comes from her ladyship herself, and I do not

doubt that you will rejoice to avail yourself of it. I would remind you that there is no obligation upon you, when you have served for two years, to sign the further bond for three years more, although his Excellency is anxious to secure this, and offers such a handsome present with the view of obtaining it. I thank you for your presence here to-day, mademoiselle, and will not trouble you any further."

The whole assembly rose and bowed as Cecil and Miss Arbuthnot passed out, Lady Haigh following them closely.

"Come to my sitting-room," she said; "you are going to lunch with me, you know. Denarien Bey will be coming in as soon as he has got rid of his friends, and then we can pick his brains to some purpose."

CHAPTER III.

A MOST ADVANTAGEOUS OFFER.

"COME in, come in," said Lady Haigh, hospitably, leading the way into her sitting-room. "Well, Cecil, my dear (for I really must call you so), were you very much astonished at the sight of that formidable array? Wasn't it just like Denarien Bey to make such a tremendous business of it? I suppose it's his nature to like to have a great fuss about everything."

"But hadn't the Pasha appointed the council of selection?" asked Miss Arbuthnot.

"Not a bit of it," laughed Lady Haigh. "Of course, for one thing, Denarien Bey was in a terrible fright. If Cecil turned out unsatisfactory, or if he bungled the business in any way, he might lose his head. So he gets together as many people as he can with whom to share the responsibility, so that he can put the blame on them if anything goes wrong, while some of them are too strong for the Pasha to touch, and the others are out of his reach. But it was simply a desire to make a great business of the matter which made him drag poor old Tussûn Bey here from the Embassy."

"Yes; I could not quite see what he had to do with it," said Miss Arbuthnot.

"Why, my dear Marian," cried Lady Haigh, "he is the Pasha's agent in the Embassy. Of course it is not called so. We say that he is 'connected with the Pasha by old ties of friendship,' but that only means that he is in his pay. He is originally and officially an ordinary secretary of Embassy; but his private and particular business is to watch over the Pasha's interests, and warn him of any danger from his enemies here, either in the Embassy or in our own Government."

"And all the other gentlemen, who were they?" asked Cecil.

"The Easterns were various Levantines and Armenians settled in London, also devoted to the Pasha's interests. Some of them are in his pay, and some of them pay him. Of course what he gives them is called remuneration for services performed, and what they give him is called a present, or a tribute of respect, or something of that sort."

"My dear Elma!" said Miss Arbuthnot, "I had no idea of the network of corruption into which you were leading us."

"Corruption?" said Lady Haigh. "You might call it corruption in England, but for Ahmed Khémi Pasha it is really only self-defence. He knows that he is surrounded by spies and people who are longing to see him make a false step, and then report it at Constantinople, poor man! Of course I don't defend his methods; I only say that from his point of view he has some excuse for them. His position is frightfully insecure. And that reminds me, you noticed the Englishman who watched over our conference just now?"

"Yes," said Miss Arbuthnot and Cecil together.

"That was Mr Skrine, the Pasha's banker, with whom Denarien Bey is staying. It is said that Ahmed

Khémi invested £50,000 with him only last year, as a precaution, of course, in case he should be obliged to take flight."

"But what is he afraid of?" asked Cecil; "has he done anything?"

"He has not committed any crime, if that is what you mean—not what is considered a crime in the East, at any rate. But he has committed the offence of existing, and of being the Pasha-Governor of Baghdad, and that alone makes him innumerable enemies. His reforms and his innovations have made him a good many more, and so the poor man has need of all the friends he can get to counteract their influence."

"But can he trust Denarien Bey? Isn't he an enemy?" asked Cecil.

"Denarien Bey stands or falls with Ahmed Khémi Pasha, as things are at present. He is too deeply committed to his cause to be able to dissociate himself from it."

"But he is an Armenian," objected Cecil, "and I thought the Armenians hated the Turks?"

"Theoretically, all Armenians hate and despise all Turks, and the Turks return the compliment with interest," said Lady Haigh, "but practically they often find each other very useful. I daresay that Denarien Bey in his foolish moments, and when he is quite sure there are no spies about, talks of independence, and glorifies Holy Russia as the protector of the enslaved. But in everyday life he remembers that he is not a patriot hiding in the hills, with a long gun and a few rags for all his possessions, but a prosperous citizen, with a wife and family to support, and a reputation to keep up. I don't know what might happen if a revolution really came, and seemed very likely to be

successful. I fancy that Denarien Bey would find political salvation then; but for anything short of that, I think he will stick to the Pasha."

"Lady Haigh, don't you believe in any one?" Cecil's tone was one of absolute dismay, and Lady Haigh laughed pleasantly.

"Not in many Armenians, dear, at any rate—or many Easterns, for that matter. I will give you a warning, Cecil. If you wish to keep your faith in human nature, don't marry a consul-general in the East. When you have knocked about as much as I have, you will know what I mean. Of course there are exceptions. Ah! here is Denarien Bey at last. Now we can have lunch, and a really interesting talk."

Cecil was still suffering under the shock caused by Lady Haigh's want of faith in oriental human nature, and she was very silent at first. But the other two ladies kept up a brisk conversation with Denarien Bey, and presently she became interested against her will.

"Of what nation is the Pasha?" she asked at last, when the rest had been discussing the various reforms which his Excellency had lately introduced.

"It is very difficult to say," replied Denarien Bey, meditatively. "I should think it probable that he has mingled Turkish, Circassian, and Egyptain blood in his veins. Nothing is known of his antecedents, but in Turkey we care little about that. When he first rose to distinction it was alleged that he himself did not know who his parents were, but he disproved the calumny by producing his mother, and installing her as the head of his harem."

"And a most disagreeable woman she is too," said Lady Haigh, with deep feeling. "I really don't know a more intolerable person. It is a perfect penance

to have to go and pay my respects to her, which is one of my official duties."

"But why is not the Pasha's wife the head of his harem?" asked Cecil.

"Which?" asked Denarien Bey, raising his eyebrows slightly.

"Oh, has he more than one? I thought he was an enlightened kind of man," said Cecil.

"He had already two wives when he came to Baghdad," said Denarien Bey. "You can suppose that his mother chose them for him, if you like, mademoiselle. But his third and favourite wife, the mother of Azim Bey, was an Arab, the daughter of the sheikh of the great Hajar tribe. So you see it is as well that there was some one to keep order in the harem, or the wills of these three ladies might have clashed."

"But how can the Pasha choose Azim Bey to succeed him if he has two sons older than he is, as you said when we were in the other room?" asked Cecil.

"Not to succeed him, mademoiselle. Surely nothing that I said could have suggested to you such an idea? In Turkey we do not believe in hereditary honours, except in the case of the sovereign, and even then it is the eldest prince in the royal family who succeeds, not necessarily the eldest son of the late king, by any means. But with respect to a pashalik like that of Baghdad, any son of the present Pasha is the very last person on whom the Padishah would think of conferring it at his death. In one or two generations a clever family might gain the allegiance of the whole province, and succeed in detaching it from the empire. It would be the height of folly to permit such a thing. No, our young friend Azim Bey will be only a private person, or if he wishes for public office, he will have to

make his way, like the sons of your own viceroys and governor-generals. Of course there will be many advantages on his side. He would have experience, friends, and plenty of money, which, after all, is the great thing with us."

"Then how is he the Pasha's heir?" asked Cecil.

"He will succeed to the bulk of his property," answered Denarien Bey, "and that is by no means contemptible."

"But what about the two elder sons?" asked Cecil.

"That is a long story," said Denarien Bey. "The Pasha's eldest son, Hussein Bey, was brought up by his mother and grandmother in retirement while his Excellency was struggling to his present position, and he grew up a very strict and bigoted Mussulman. Ahmed Khémi is, as you, mademoiselle, have heard, a man of liberal and enlightened opinions, and as soon as he sent for his household to Baghdad, trouble began. Whatever the Pasha did was bitterly opposed by his son, who was supported by the influence of the palace harem. At length things became so bad that Hussein Bey was banished, but he is still concerned in every plot which is set on foot by the more fanatical among the Moslems to get rid of the Pasha, and he hates, perhaps not unnaturally, his half-brother, Azim Bey. I believe that his mother and grandmother have some wild idea that he may be able, if properly supported, to depose his father and succeed him. Such a case has occurred once during the present century, but it is not in the least likely to be repeated, and they are not the right people to bring it about, in any case."

"And the second son?" asked Cecil.

"Ah, the difficulty about Mahmoud Bey was of a

different kind. His Excellency was much at Constantinople before he became Pasha, and while there he associated a good deal with certain members of the European colony at Pera, who were not, perhaps, altogether the best company he could have found. Among these was a Frenchman named Cadran, who acted as tutor to the young Mahmoud Bey, and made himself very useful to his father. When his Excellency came to Baghdad, M. Cadran accompanied him, and was even allowed to give French lessons to Naimeh Khanum, the Pasha's eldest daughter, who was then very young. Suddenly it was discovered that he was trying to induce the young lady to elope with him, and was doing his best to gain her attendants over by bribery. Of course the fellow was sent off at once, and unfortunately, he was sent off so quickly that he was able to present a claim for damages. The French Government took up the matter, and the Pasha was forced to pay very heavily. Some time before, it had been arranged that Mahmoud Bey was to finish his education in France, and he was sent to the École Polytechnique. That was all very well, but when he had finished his course of study, he refused to come back. He was enjoying himself in Paris, with Cadran at his elbow, and his Excellency was in communication with the French Government on the subject, when the Bey died suddenly and all was ended."

"And so Azim Bey is the only one left?" said Cecil.

"Just so, mademoiselle. Emineh¹ Khanum, his mother, was, as I have said, the Pasha's favourite wife, and on her deathbed she induced him to prom-

¹ This name, the feminine form of Emin or Amin, is the Amina of the earlier translations of the 'Arabian Nights.' Khanum means lady.

ise to make her son his heir. That was just after Mahmoud Bey's first refusal to come home, and his Excellency was so angry that he consented at once. But it was a foolish wish of the poor mother's to see her son the heir, for his brothers became incensed against him immediately, and he is a mark for the hatred of the whole harem. Now that his mother is dead, there is no one to protect him, and the Um-ul-Pasha (mother of the Pasha) and the other two wives hate him for the sake of the two elder sons. His Excellency has been obliged always to take him with him wherever he went, and to keep him in the *selamlık* (the men's part of the house), instead of the harem when at home, to save his life; but he finds that the Bey, from being so much with men, is growing precocious and conceited, and he desires therefore to obtain a governess for him."

"But what made him wish for an Englishwoman?"

Denarien Bey smiled grimly.

"It is not easy, mademoiselle, to find ladies of other nationalities who combine the necessary qualifications. A Frenchwoman might have been obtained, but after what I have told you, you will not be surprised to hear that his Excellency would not allow a French person to enter the palace, much less to have the charge of his son. For the English, on the contrary, he has the highest admiration, and would have liked to send the Bey to be educated at one of your great public schools. The desire, however, of keeping him under his own eye, and the fear of a repetition of his experience with Mahmoud Bey, induces him to prefer this method, if it can be found practicable."

Shortly after this Denarien Bey took his departure, after again expressing his earnest hope that Cecil

would see her way clear to accepting the post offered her. When he was gone, Lady Haigh rose.

"Come, Marian," she said to Miss Arbuthnot, "you and I are going to do our shopping. You promised me the whole day, you know. Cecil is going to sit down and write a glowing description of the situation the Pasha offers her to her father, and say how much she longs to take it."

"But I don't in the least think that papa will let me go, Lady Haigh," said Cecil, waiving the remark about her personal wishes.

"If he won't, he is a much more foolish man than I think him," replied Lady Haigh, in her most uncompromising manner; "and I shall consider it my duty to write him an urgent letter of remonstrance."

"When you go back, Lady Haigh," asked Cecil, suddenly, "shall you go to Beyrout and Damascus and then across the desert to Baghdad?"

"When *we* go back, my dear Cecil," corrected Lady Haigh, impressively, "we shall go by the P. & O. to Karachi, then by another steamer to Basra, and then by another to Baghdad. I am not an adventurous young lady disposed to be sentimental over Bedouin wanderers, and I have no wish to go through unnecessary hardships, nor yet to be captured by insurgent Arabs and held to ransom, and so I fear that you will have to be content to accompany the steady-going old woman by this humdrum route."

"But I am quite sure that papa will never let me go," repeated Cecil, confidently, with a sigh that was not all of sadness.

For æsthetic reasons she would be sorry not to see Baghdad, but everything else seemed to combine to make her dread going there. She was so strongly con-

vinced that her father would share her feelings, that she gave herself a great deal of trouble in trying to compose a letter to him which should be scrupulously fair, and place all the advantages of the situation in their proper light. The letter once written and sent off, she felt quite at ease in her mind, and was even disposed to mourn gently over the chance she was losing. It was Miss Arbuthnot, and not Cecil, who betrayed excitement when Mr Anstruther's answer arrived, and waited with bated breath whilst it was opened.

"I am sure he won't let me go, Miss Arbuthnot," Cecil had said, smiling, as she took up the envelope; but on glancing through the letter she uttered a cry, and looked up with a piteous face of dismay.

"Oh! Miss Arbuthnot, he wants me to go—at least, he says that it seems a most excellent offer, and he is coming up to town early to-morrow morning to see about it and to talk to you."

"Well, my dear, it only confirms the high opinion I have always held of your father's judgment. I expected he would say just this."

"It only shows how dreadfully I must have failed at home if papa is so anxious to send me away," said Cecil, on the verge of tears.

"My dear child, if you will only look at things in a sensible light instead of determining to make yourself out a martyr, you will remember that Mr Anstruther is probably thinking only how much you could help with the boys' education."

But Cecil refused to be consoled, and her only comfort lay in the hope that Mr Anstruther would find the post unsatisfactory when he came to look into its conditions a little more. But she was out when he

arrived, and he was ushered immediately into the presence of Miss Arbuthnot and Lady Haigh, who both assured him that Cecil was an extremely fortunate girl to have such a chance.

"You see," said Miss Arbuthnot, "Cecil has done so very well that an ordinary situation as governess or High School mistress is not to be thought of for her. But here is an almost unique post waiting for her acceptance in which she may do work which might well be called making history. It is true that she must bind herself for five years or so, but this is less of a drawback in her case than in others. I do not myself think that she is likely to marry—at any rate, not early—for she is a little fastidious in her tastes,—not that this is to be regretted, but rather admired."

Mr Anstruther almost blushed when he heard his daughter's future thus candidly discussed. It had not occurred to him to regard marriage in the light in which it appeared to Miss Arbuthnot—as a kind of devouring gulf which swallowed up the finest products of the female education movement—and it seemed to him indelicate to estimate probabilities so openly. But both ladies were so evidently unconscious of Miss Arbuthnot's having said anything improper that he quickly recovered his composure and listened undisturbed to Lady Haigh's *exposé* of the advantages of the scheme. The consequence was that when Cecil came in her father's last doubts had been removed, and he was ready to bid her God-speed in her enterprise.

"Oh! Miss Arbuthnot, must I go?" she asked despairingly, when Mr Anstruther had hurried off to catch his train for Whitcliffe, and Cecil and the principal were at tea in the latter's sanctum.

"That is for you to decide," answered Miss Arbuthnot.

"That is just what papa said," wailed Cecil; "but I don't want to decide."

"That means that you don't want to go to Baghdad?" said Miss Arbuthnot.

"I want to go if it is right," said Cecil; "but how am I to know whether it is right? Don't you think it seems like going into temptation?"

"Temptation of what kind?" asked Miss Arbuthnot. "Temptation to become a Mohammedan, do you mean? No, my dear Cecil, I cannot honestly say that I think the side of Islam you will see at Baghdad is likely to attract you to it."

"Now you are laughing at me," said Cecil, reproachfully.

"Dear child, I want to help you. If you feel that there is a work to be done in Baghdad, and that you are called to do it, go; if not, stay at home."

"But I am not to have anything to do with Azim Bey's religious education. Denarien Bey said that the Pasha would look after that."

"You can show him a Christian life, and you can exercise a Christian influence," said Miss Arbuthnot. "You have the honour of England and of Christianity in your hands, Cecil, and it will be your work to remove prejudice and to set an example of honesty and incorruptibility."

"But how am I to know that it is my work?" asked Cecil again.

"Cecil!" said Miss Arbuthnot, more in sorrow than in anger, "do I hear one of my girls talking like this? This work is offered to you, and you doubt whether it is meant for you. Your father, considering you a reasonable being, leaves the decision to you, and you will not decide."

"But I had so much rather he had told me outright either to go or to stay," pleaded Cecil. "I can't bear deciding for myself."

"Timidity again, Cecil. So far as I can make you out, you are convinced that you ought to go, but you want to stay."

"I do really want to do what is right, Miss Arbuthnot, but it feels so dreadful to be going so far away from every one."

"I only know I cannot drift
Beyond His love and care,"

quoted Miss Arbuthnot, reverently.

"Oh! Miss Arbuthnot, you all want to drive me to Baghdad," cried Cecil, with tears in her eyes.

"Is not that very thing the leading you are looking for?" asked Miss Arbuthnot.

"I think it must be," said Cecil, slowly. "Say no more, Miss Arbuthnot—I will go."

CHAPTER IV.

THE SHINING EAST.

A VERY busy time followed upon Cecil's decision. Her agreement with the Pasha had to be signed at once, before Denarien Bey left London, though it was not to come into force until she reached Baghdad. It was an imposing document, written in French, Arabic, and Turkish, with an English translation thoughtfully appended, and Denarien Bey signed it on the Pasha's behalf, Lady Haigh adding her signature as a witness. Two lawyers and several interpreters assisted in drawing up the deed, and the extraordinary stipulations considered necessary by one party and the other became a subject of mirth for both. When this legal business was ended, Cecil went down to Whitcliffe for her farewells, and found that her prospective departure had cast such a glamour over her in the eyes of the younger children, that they regarded her with a mixture of awe and envy delightful to behold. She was early informed that she was expected to see and describe in full both Noah's Ark and the Tower of Babel; while the mere mention of Nineveh, Babylon, and the Euphrates filled the youthful minds with an expectant wonder, which would have been sur-

prised by no result of her prospective travels, however astounding.

Mrs Anstruther was chiefly concerned as to the fate of a box of plain and fancy needlework, the fruit of the labours of the St Barnabas' working-party during the past winter, which was destined for Mrs Yehudi, the wife of a Jewish missionary labouring at Baghdad among his own people,¹ and which Cecil was requested to deliver in person. It was so delightful to think that Cecil would be able to write her a special account of Dr and Mrs Yehudi's work, to be read aloud at the working-party, said Mrs Anstruther, who believed fervently in her step-daughter, and thought that she was the most wonderful young woman in the world. Perhaps it was this very faith which made her, in Cecil's present state of mind, appear unsympathetic, for her imagination was vivid, and ran riot among the gorgeous possibilities of the situation, having been nourished principally on a careful study of the 'Arabian Nights,' which Mrs Anstruther regarded as a sort of introductory guide-book to modern Baghdad.

Taken altogether, the last few weeks at Whitcliffe were so heart-breaking that Cecil was almost relieved when the day arrived for her departure. She had still ten days or so to spend in London in getting her outfit, and her father was to come up to see her off, but this must be the final farewell to Mrs Anstruther and the children. Cecil could almost have gone down on her knees to beg to be allowed to stay, if that would have done any good, so utterly desolate and lonely did she feel in view of the prospect which lay before her; but

¹ Baghdad is not now a station of the London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews. The Church Missionary Society has a medical mission there.

the remembrance of Miss Arbuthnot's strictures came over her, and helped her to depart without quite breaking down. But it was very hard, and when once the train was fairly on its way she withdrew into her corner and cried. What were all the splendours and potentialities of her future position compared with the row of tear-stained faces she had seen on the platform, as she leaned out to get the last sight of the station? Through all her wanderings that picture would remain imprinted on her mind, its comic elements unperceived, and all appearing as saddest earnest. Other people, whose attention was attracted by the family group, laughed to behold Mr Anstruther forcibly restraining Patsy and Terry, whose paroxysms of grief threatened to land them on the rails, while Fitz stood by, with his hands deep in his pockets, trying hard to whistle, and thereby prove his manhood. Eily, Norah, and Geraldine, wiping their eyes vigorously with abnormally dirty pocket-handkerchiefs, did not detract from the moving effect of the scene upon a disinterested bystander, nor did Mrs Anstruther, who had little Loey in her arms, and wiped her eyes upon his jacket. Indeed, a cynical passenger in Cecil's own compartment, on hearing the tempest of wails and sobs which heralded the departure of the train, remarked that the members of that family were evidently trying to compete against the railway-whistle, and that they stood an excellent chance of success. He had only jumped in as the train moved off, and did not guess Cecil's relationship to the family in question, but his wife nudged him fiercely and frowningly, and he said no more.

During her ten days in London Cecil had little time to give to grief. It was an incessant rush from shop

co stores, and from stores to shop, a whirl of choosing things, and being fitted, and packing and superintending. She had not only her own things to get, but an assortment of the best and newest books and teaching appliances for her future schoolroom at Baghdad. For this she had *carte blanche* from the Pasha, and was further empowered to order a certain number of books on educational subjects to be sent out to her every year. Cecil had always (except at the moment of teaching her young brothers and sisters) felt a pride and pleasure in her profession as teacher, and she hailed with joy this proof of the high estimation in which his Excellency also held her office. Miss Arbuthnot luxuriated as much as she did in the newest educational inventions, but it was with an unselfish, altruistic delight, for the governors of the South Central High School had no mind for experiments, and preferred to wait until a new idea was several years old before adopting it.

At last all was ready, and books and maps and school furniture were safely packed and sent on board ship in company with Cecil's own modest outfit. It had been arranged that she was to adopt a modification of the native costume when at Baghdad, so as to avoid as far as possible shocking the susceptibilities of the Moslems in the Palace, and her personal luggage was therefore comparatively small in bulk; still, it represented a good deal of care and thought, and Cecil and Miss Arbuthnot heaved sighs of relief when it was off their minds. The next business was the farewell to the old School, where the girls and governesses, most of whom knew Cecil well, and nearly all of whom regarded her with admiring envy, entertained her at supper, and presented her with an elaborate dressing-case, in re-

turning thanks for which she so nearly broke down that Miss Arbuthnot had to finish the speech for her.

This was on the very last evening before her departure, and the next day her father came up by the first train from Whitcliffe, and Lady Haigh gave her up to him until three o'clock. If Cecil had been inclined to think that she had caused more disappointment than joy to her father, she was undeceived by those last few hours spent alone with him, when he allowed a corner of the veil of reserve which usually shrouded his inner feelings to lift, and let her see something of what she really was to him. To poor Mr Anstruther, however, on looking back on it, the interview did not seem to have been at all satisfactory, for he had been thinking for days past of things he ought to say to his daughter, and after it he was continually remembering others which he ought to have said, none of which had occurred to him at the time. As it was, he gave her many pieces of advice as to her behaviour, her occupations, her influence over her pupil, her Sundays, and so on, interspersed with periods of sorrowful silence, which were far more eloquent than his abrupt and painful counsels. Thus the time passed as they walked up and down the Thames Embankment together, or sat down and pretended to admire the flower-beds, and then they made their way slowly to the place where they were to meet Lady Haigh. Miss Arbuthnot had heroically denied herself the last sight of her pupil that she and her father might be alone together as long as possible, and thus Cecil had no one but Mr Anstruther to think of as she leant out of the carriage window for a last look at his tall spare figure and lined face. It was the last look for five years, and five such years!—too much

to have faced if she had known what they were to bring.

It seemed to Cecil afterwards that Lady Haigh must have talked on quietly and continuously, without making a pause or expecting an answer, from the time they left the hotel until they reached the docks. It was kindly intended, no doubt, that Cecil might have time to cry a little and recover herself, but as a means of conveying information it was a failure. Lady Haigh told Cecil all about the captain and officers of the steamer by which they were to travel, and by which she herself had returned to England. She also remarked that her own Syrian maid had gone on board already with the luggage and would give Cecil any assistance she might need during the earlier part of the voyage, since the attendant who had been specially engaged for her would not join them until they reached Egypt. They were to break their journey at Alexandria and pay a visit of a week or two to Cairo, where a married sister of Lady Haigh's was living, whose husband occupied a prominent post in the *entourage* of the then Khedive. Here also they were to be joined by a cousin of Lady Haigh's, who had just been appointed surgeon of the hospital attached to the British Residency at Baghdad, and who was to escort them during the rest of their journey. By means of this one-sided conversation the chasm caused by the actual parting was bridged, and Lady Haigh beguiled the time of dropping down the Thames and settling their cabin with similar pieces of information, while, when they were once fairly at sea, Cecil was too ill to be able to think of any but strictly personal miseries.

For once the agents' rose-coloured forecast of the

voyage proved to be correct. The steamer did not meet with bad weather, nor did her engines break down, and she accomplished the distance in rather less than the average time, but Lady Haigh refused to listen to Cecil's plea for a day or two in Alexandria, and insisted on hurrying on at once to Cairo.

"My dear," she said, "all this"—with a contemptuous wave of her hand towards the fine houses on either side of the broad street through which they were driving—"all this is modern, European, French, tasteless! You want to enjoy your first sight of Eastern life, you say? Very well, then thank me for taking you at once where you will really see it, and not this wretched half-imitation."

"But the sky! the palm-trees! the people! the colours, Lady Haigh!" cried Cecil in an ecstasy.

"Nonsense, my dear—nothing to what you will see at Cairo!" and Cecil was forced to be content.

A short railway journey brought them to Cairo, and they found Mr Boleyn, Lady Haigh's brother-in-law, waiting to meet them. They drove to his house in a luxurious carriage, with running footmen and a magnificent coachman, and Cecil left the talk to her two companions, and gave herself up to the enjoyment of the new pictures which met her eye on every side. It seemed to her that she would have liked that drive to go on for ever, and she was genuinely sorry, tired though she was, to reach the Boleyns' house, although she ought to have felt more sympathy for Lady Haigh, who had not seen her sister for over twenty years. It seemed to Cecil, however, that both ladies would have acquiesced cheerfully in an even longer separation, for they could not forget the time when Lady Haigh had been a clever and irrepressible younger sister, and Mrs

Boleyn had felt it her duty systematically to snub her. Life in the tropics had not suited the elder sister as well as it had the younger, and Mrs Boleyn was tall and gaunt and withered, with a tendency to exult over Lady Haigh, because she (Mrs Boleyn) had always said that Elma would soon be tired of her studies and her talk about Women's Rights, and would marry like other people.

"But she didn't say that at all, my dear," Lady Haigh confided to Cecil when they were going to their rooms. "What she always said was that I should never get a husband because of my ridiculous notions."

These ancient hostilities were renewed at dinner over the mention of Dr Egerton, the gentleman who was to escort the travellers for the rest of their way.

"Charlie has not arrived yet, I see," Lady Haigh said pleasantly, as they sat down to the table.

"No, and he is not likely to arrive, so far as I can tell," said Mrs Boleyn. "The temptations of Port Said have probably been too much for him. What good you expect a feather-pated rattlebrain like that to do at Baghdad, I don't know! I don't consider that you have done yourself at all a good turn, Elma, in inducing Dugald to get him appointed there."

"Charlie is a good fellow, and I want him to have a chance at last," said Lady Haigh, stoutly. "He has been unfortunate in his superiors hitherto."


"I consider that his superiors have been extremely unfortunate in him," said Mrs Boleyn, with crushing calmness.

"Well, we shall see," said Lady Haigh, peaceably. "I hope to do what I can to smooth his path, and Dugald will make allowances which another man would not, perhaps."

"I call it a very foolish and ill-advised thing to bring him to Baghdad," persisted Mrs Boleyn; but as her sister did not accept the challenge, the matter dropped.

Mr Boleyn ate his dinner industriously without taking any notice of the little dispute, and Cecil felt that his plan was the wisest, after she had received two or three snubs from his wife in the course of the evening for injudiciously endeavouring to change the subject of the conversation when it seemed to be verging upon dangerous ground. Mrs Boleyn's manner and appearance did not tend to recommend her opinions to the casual observer, and Cecil espoused Lady Haigh's side of the case so warmly in her own mind that she really did not need the further assurance which her friend gave her when they went to their rooms that night, and she found herself summoned to Lady Haigh's balcony for a talk.

"I really can't let you go to bed, Cecil, without putting you right about poor Charlie Egerton. You mustn't let Helena prejudice you against him, for she has a way of finding something unpleasant to say about every one. I think you know me well enough by this time, my dear child, to be sure that I should not be likely to countenance anything really unsatisfactory or wrong; but the fact is that, as I said, Charlie has been unfortunate. He is very clever, and a most delightful fellow, but he and his superiors always manage to rub one another the wrong way. I dare-say he is very eccentric, and likes to mix with the natives more than Englishmen in the East generally do, but several great men have done the same, and it is only a matter of taste, after all, not a crime. He is very outspoken, too, and perhaps too much disposed



to be hail-fellow-well-met with every one he comes across. I verily believe that if he met the Viceroy himself"—Lady Haigh spoke with bated breath—"out for a walk, he would enter into conversation quite coolly and offer him a cigar, just as if he was a man of his own standing. If the Viceroy was a nice sensible sort of man and took it all as it was meant, it would be all right, but if he was angry and tried to snub him, Charlie would be very much hurt, perhaps indignant, and would probably let him know it. You can imagine how a man of this sort comes into collision with some of our stiff-and-starched officials. They can't understand a surgeon, with not so very many years' service, trying it on with them in that way, and they consider it impudence; so they snub him, and that produces a coldness. Then Charlie comes across some abuse, or some piece of official neglect which he thinks it his duty to expose, and I should fear, my dear, that, remembering the past, he doesn't do it as tenderly as he might. Then there are reports and complaints and censures, and finally Dr Egerton is requested to resign. This has happened two or three times."

"A good man, no doubt, but perhaps not a very wise one," was Cecil's comment.

"That's just it, my dear—as good as gold, but with no worldly wisdom whatever. Well, I have got Sir Dugald to use his influence to get him this post at Baghdad, and I only hope he may keep it. But now I see Marta glaring at me like a reproachful ghost for keeping her up so long, so I must send you away, Cecil. To-morrow night you also will have begun to learn what a tyrant a confidential maid may become."

Cecil laughed, and said she meant to enjoy her last

evening of freedom, which she did by writing a long letter to her father, and describing to him all that she had seen since her landing at Alexandria. Consequently, she overslept herself the next morning and did not wake until Marta brought her in a cup of tea, and informed her that her maid had come and was waiting to see her.

"I didn't know that Eastern people got up so early in the morning now," said Cecil to herself as she dressed. "I thought they were always about half a day late, but I suppose this is a unique specimen."

"Come, Cecil," said Lady Haigh, tapping at her door, "don't you want to speak to your maid? She has been waiting quite a long time." And Cecil hurried through her toilet obediently, and, coming out of her room, found a tall, severe-looking elderly Syrian woman talking to her friend.

"Her name is Khartûm," said Lady Haigh, turning to Cecil, "but she is always called Um Yusuf—mother of Joseph, that is. It is the custom in Syria, you know. She has been a widow a good many years, and her son is a soldier in the Turkish army. Her last situation was at Constantinople, where she was nurse to the children of Lord Calne, the late Ambassador, so she knows a good deal about the ins and outs of Court life, and will be able to give you all the needed hints as to etiquette, and so on. Of course I shall always be glad to tell you anything; but then you will not have me continually at hand, and really good manners in Turkey are a very complicated business."

In fact, Um Yusuf's duties were those of a duenna quite as much as a maid, and she was well fitted in appearance for the post. She wore the long black silk mantle of the respectable Egyptian woman, which

enveloped her from head to foot, and Lady Haigh commended the costume as exceedingly sensible and responsible-looking.

"You will have to accompany Miss Anstruther everywhere," she said to the maid; "and I am sure I can depend upon you to help her with your experience whenever she feels puzzled."

"She too young," said Um Yusuf, bending her black brows on Cecil for the first time. We spare the reader the good woman's pronunciation, while preserving her eccentric grammatical style. "Why she not stay home and get married? Tahir Pasha's daughter have governess, old lady with spectacles, not like this. Azim Bey very bad boy. Laugh at Mademoiselle Antaza."

"That is cheering news for you, Cecil," said Lady Haigh, laughing; "but I don't think you'll be frightened. Miss Anstruther knows something about naughty boys, Um Yusuf. She has four brothers at home."

"English bad boy not like Toork bad boy," said the imperturbable Um Yusuf; "Azim Bey wicked boy, read bad books, go do bad things. My cousin in Baghdad tell me all about him."

"A boy of ten who reads bad books!" cried Lady Haigh. I didn't know I was bringing you to face such a monster of juvenile depravity, Cecil. These Eastern children are very precocious, I know, but I never thought of this particular form of wickedness. Well, my dear, I think you will conquer him if any one can. But now it is breakfast-time, and we are going to the bazaars afterwards with the dragoman, so we must not be late. You can go to your sister Marta, Um Yusuf, and she will show you the way about the house. She can tell you all you want to know, too, so you need not trouble to try to read Miss Anstruther's letters."

CHAPTER V.

A NEW EXPERIENCE.

"THERE!" said Lady Haigh, "what do you think of that, Cecil?"

They were sitting on the divan in a little cramped-up shop in one of the bazaars, with tiny cups of black coffee before them, and all manner of lovely fabrics—silks and muslins and brocades and gauzes—strewn around. The proprietor of the establishment, an elderly Moslem with a long beard, was exhibiting listlessly a rich, soft silk, as though it was not of the slightest consequence to him whether they bought anything or not. Leaning against the door-post was the gorgeously attired dragoman whom Mr Boleyn had ordered to attend the ladies in their shopping, and who made himself actively objectionable by insisting on explaining everything that met their eyes, regardless of the fact that Lady Haigh was an old Eastern traveller, and that Cecil had read so much about Egypt that, but for her ignorance of the language, she could have acted as cicerone in a Cairo street as well as he could.

At the sound of Lady Haigh's voice, Cecil, whose seat was nearest the street, turned with a start, for her eyes

had wandered down the long dim arcade and among the many-coloured figures thronging it.

"I think it will do very well," she said, and withdrawing her eyes resolutely from the street, devoted herself to listening to the energetic bargaining carried on between her friend and the shopman with the dragoman's assistance. It was very oriental, of course, but it spoiled the poetry of the scene, and she was glad when Lady Haigh at last rose and left the shop, after paying for the silk and directing it to be sent to the house.

"Caffé-house, ladies," said the dragoman, when they had gone on a little farther; and Cecil looked with much interest and curiosity at the building he pointed out. It was a large, low room, with one side open to the street, crowded with men sitting on the divans and smoking, or drinking coffee out of cups which stood beside them on little low tables. The group was a motley one, and Cecil, as soon as her eyes became accustomed to the dim light, began to try and make out by their costume the nationality of the different items that composed it. Following the sound of a loud distinct voice speaking in some unknown tongue, her gaze reached the speaker, and she saw to her amazement that he was a European, or at any rate a sun-burnt, dark-haired young man in ordinary English dress. Lady Haigh's eyes followed hers, and seemed to make the same discovery at the same moment, for their owner recoiled suddenly, and, seizing Cecil's arm, led her away.

"Storree-teller tell tale, ladies," remarked the dragoman, but Lady Haigh appeared to be stifling irresistible laughter, and Cecil wondered whether the story-teller were an oriental Mark Twain.

"I know that boy will be the death of me!" cried Lady Haigh, finding her voice at last. "My dear, it's Charlie!"

"Charlie? Dr Egerton, your cousin?" gasped Cecil.

"The same, my dear. This is one of his freaks. You know I told you how fond he is of mixing with the natives wherever he goes. Now I daresay he has been a week in Cairo without ever letting Helena and her husband know he was here, staying in some wretched little native inn, and prowling about the bazaars all day."

Cecil's private thought was that Dr Egerton's tastes in the matter of hotel accommodation must be peculiar, though she herself acknowledged the fascination of the bazaars; but she had not time to make any remark on the subject, for they heard some one running after them, and turning, beheld the coffee-house hero himself.

"Cousin Elma!" he cried, shaking hands with her, "I am so dreadfully ashamed not to have known you. I had a dim idea that there were some English ladies there, looking into the room, but I didn't in the least know who it was until a Baghdadi, who happened to be among the audience, said—I mean, told me you were there."

"Oh, don't be afraid of hurting my feelings, my dear boy. I know he said, 'O my Effendi, behold the Mother of Teeth,' now didn't he?" and Lady Haigh laughed long and heartily.

"You are cruelly hard on my poor little attempts at politeness, Cousin Elma. You will give your friend an awful idea of me. Oh, by the bye," with intense eagerness, "what have you done with the old lady? Is she at Cousin Helena's? How do they get on together?"

"My dear Charlie, what old lady? I have not the faintest idea whom you mean."

"Why, the lady graduate, the instructress of youth, Mentor in a pith helmet and spectacles, the new female Lycurgus,—his Excellency's English governess?"

"Charlie, have I never told you not to run on at such a rate? I want to introduce you. This is Miss Anstruther, officially known as Mademoiselle Antaza, his Excellency's English governess."

"Impossible!" cried he, aghast.

"Really," said Cecil, with some pique in her tone, "everybody seems to think it their duty to impress upon me that I am very young and very giddy for the office. I am rather tired of it."

"My dear Miss Anstruther," said Charlie Egerton, solemnly, "I only wish I were Azim Bey!"

"Charlie, for shame!" cried Lady Haigh. "I will not have you tease Miss Anstruther. Remember that you will be companions all through our voyage to Baghdad, so you must behave properly. Cecil, my dear, you must not mind this wild boy. He is always getting into trouble by means of his tongue, and never takes warning. Charlie, I want to know how it is that you have not turned up at Helena's house. She hasn't an idea that you are in Cairo at all."

"Cousin Helena's house would be a desert to me without you, Cousin Elma; surely you know that? I felt it so acutely when I came, that I determined not to show myself there until you were safely arrived. I strolled round each day and had a talk with the *bowab* (doorkeeper), and so learned the news. I knew you were expected last night, and I meant to present myself in decent time for dinner this evening. I'll do so still unless you have any objection."

"I only hope," said Lady Haigh, rather absently, "that you won't talk nonsense of this kind to Helena. She won't understand it, you know."

"If you wish it, Cousin Elma, I will confine my conversation exclusively to Miss Anstruther. I couldn't venture to talk nonsense to her, so that ought to keep me safe."

"My dear Charlie, nothing but a gag would keep *you* safe," said Lady Haigh, with deep conviction. "And now we are going in here to do some shopping, and we don't want any gentlemen to interrupt us, so good-bye until this evening."

He turned away with a rueful look which made both ladies laugh, and disappeared obediently among the brilliant crowd, Lady Haigh only waiting until he was out of earshot to inquire anxiously what Cecil thought of him.

"He seems rather talkative," said Cecil, expressing her thought mildly. "An empty-headed rattle," was what she said in her own mind, and Lady Haigh, as if guessing this, took up the cudgels at once on her cousin's behalf.

"Oh, that's nothing but nervousness, my dear. You would really never guess that Charlie is simply afraid of ladies, especially young ones. He talks like that just to keep his courage up. But he is not like some men, all on the surface. There's plenty of good stuff behind. Why, you mightn't think it, but he can talk eight or nine Eastern dialects well enough to make the natives think him an oriental, and there are not many of whom that can be said. I'm afraid all his cleverness has gone in that direction, instead of helping him on in the world. Natives always take to him wonderfully, but when you've said that you've said all, or nearly all."

Even after this, Cecil still thought that Lady Haigh's fondness for her cousin made her very kind to his virtues and decidedly blind to his faults; but she was a little ashamed of this hasty generalisation after a discussion she had with him that evening, and felt obliged to confess that there was more in Dr Egerton than she had thought. Dinner was over, and they were sitting out in the open court of the Boleyns' house. Mr Boleyn had been obliged to go out to attend some official function, and the voices of Lady Haigh and Mrs Boleyn, as they discussed, more or less amicably, reminiscences of their youth, mingled pleasantly with the soothing plash of the fountain. A severe snubbing from Mrs Boleyn during dinner had failed to reduce Charlie to silence or contrition, but now he seemed to enter into Cecil's mood, and waited meekly until she chose to speak. To Cecil, lying back in her chair in a bower of strange creepers and flowering-shrubs, watching the moonlight as it crept over the walls of the house and the more distant minarets of a mosque a little way off, it seemed almost sacrilege to talk. But she awoke at last to the fact that she was not doing her duty by her companion, and reluctantly broke the delightful silence by the only remark which would come into her mind.

"Isn't it lovely?" she asked, softly, and Charlie awoke out of a reverie, and made haste to answer that it was heavenly.

"I have longed for this all my life," said Cecil, "and Lady Haigh says that Baghdad will be even better."

"Better? in what way?" asked Charlie.

"More Eastern, you know," said Cecil, "but I can't imagine anything more perfect than this."

"I see that you are one of the people who feel the fascination of the East," said he.

"Who could help it?" asked Cecil. "It is a fascination, there is no other word for it. Kingsley says that a longing for the West is bound up in the hearts of men, but I think that in this age of the world the reverse is true. I daresay if I had ever been in America it would be different; but now it seems to me that all the romance is gone from the West, and that it is all big towns, and gold-mines, and wonderful inventions, and rush. The East seems so mysterious and reposeful, so old, too, and so picturesque."

"And yet," said Charlie, "you want to change it all, and import into it the newest ideas in religions and the latest Yankee culture. You would like all those mysterious veiled women, with the beautiful eyes, whom you saw to-day, to be turned into learned ladies in tweed frocks and hard hats, with spectacles and short hair."

"No, indeed," said Cecil, "that is not my ideal at all. A modification of their own style of dress would be much more suitable to them than a bad copy of ours. And they couldn't all be learned, but they all ought to know a good deal more than they can at present, poor things! If they were only better educated, it would be much easier to introduce reforms. Denarien Bey says that most of Ahmed Khémi Pasha's plans are thwarted by his harem."

Charlie groaned. "I beg your pardon, Miss Anstruther," he said, "but my feelings were too much for me. An Eastern I can respect, a European I can pity, but a Europeanised, Europeanising Turk like Ahmed Khémi I can only detest."

"I can't hear my employer spoken against in that way," said Cecil.

"Your employer? So he is. Well, Miss Anstruther,

I can forgive him anything, since he is bringing you to Baghdad."

Cecil frowned. "I really cannot imagine," she said, severely, "how a person like yourself, who admires quiet so intensely, can talk so much."

"That is the fault of the two natures in me," said Charlie, gravely, though he was inwardly shaking with laughter over this amazing snub. "As a European, I am bound to talk and go on like other people, to be feverishly busy, and if I have no work of my own, to hunt up other people's and set them at it. Then I get sick of it all, and go off and become an Eastern. Perfect idleness is then my highest idea of happiness, and I am quite content to sit for a whole day in the tent-door with an Arab sheikh, exchanging platitudes on the inevitability of the decrees of fate, at intervals of half an hour."

"But have you ever tried that?" asked Cecil, laughing.

"Tried it? I do it periodically, whenever I can get hold of a sufficiently unsophisticated sheikh. It doesn't do to go to the same people twice. They always find out somehow afterwards who you really are, and spot you the next time. But the desert life is wonderful, simply wonderful! The mere thought of it makes me long to go out there and begin it again this moment. It is so free and irregular. You pass from tremendous exertion to absolute idleness."

"And while you are idle the poor women do all the work," interrupted Cecil, unkindly.

"Yes, that is where Eastern and Western notions clash," said Charlie. "There must be some drawbacks even to desert life, and one scarcely feels called upon to go about lecturing to the Arabs on the proper treat

ment of their wives." He looked at Cecil mischievously, but she declined to be drawn into an argument on the subject of women's rights, and asked—

"Have you ever spent a really long time in the desert?"

"That depends on what you consider a long time," he answered. "When I was in Persia I went with a caravan of pilgrims from Resht to Kerbela, which took some time, and a good part of the way lay through the desert. Of course the pilgrims were not always the most delightful of fellow-travellers, and one couldn't help objecting very strongly to the companionship of the dead bodies which were carried along slung on mules to be buried at Kerbela. It was rather wearing, too, to have to be on your guard the whole time lest you should betray yourself, for the pilgrims are not particular, and would have torn you to pieces as soon as look at you. But it was great fun, all the same. There was pleasure even in the risk, and then it's not many Europeans that get the chance of seeing the holy places. All that, and the desert as well."

"But I don't understand," said Cecil. "Do you mean that you pretended to be a Mohammedan?"

"Yes," answered Charlie, smiling. "I assure you that I am not one really, Miss Anstruther."

"I don't see that that makes it any better," said Cecil. "You mean that you dressed up and went through all the ceremonies just as if you had been a Mohammedan, and said all the prayers, and never meant it? Of course they are wrong, but they believe in their religion, and it can't make it right for us to do things of that kind. Besides, for you it was acting a lie."

"Well, I don't know. It never struck me in that

light," said Charlie. "I'm afraid I looked upon it as part of the joke, Miss Anstruther. Well, perhaps not of the joke—as part of what had to be gone through to ensure success. You see, I had an object. I was studying the dissemination of cholera by means of these caravans of pilgrims, and I wanted to do it thoroughly, so I thought I would go in for the whole thing. But I might perhaps have done it and stopped short of that. I'll remember another time."

"Charles," said Mrs Boleyn's voice, "perhaps you are not aware of the lateness of the hour;" and after this delicate hint, Charlie took his departure. During the remainder of their stay in Cairo, he made a point of appearing at unexpected times, and helping the travellers to organise expeditions to the Pyramids and other points of interest, but he turned a deaf ear to Lady Haigh's hint that he ought to volunteer to come and take up his quarters at the Boleyns', and at this they could scarcely wonder. Before the end of their stay, Cecil, though declaring emphatically that she was not in the least tired of Cairo, began to display great eagerness to reach Baghdad, and Lady Haigh made no pretence of disguising her desire to do the same.

"Helena and I agree better apart, my dear," she explained frankly to Cecil. "One really can't quarrel much in letters, but when we are together we can't do anything else."

This was already sufficiently obvious, and it is probable that no one, unless perhaps Mr Boleyn, was sorry when the time came for the travellers to journey to Port Said, there to resume their interrupted voyage. Lady Haigh and Cecil, with their two maids, and Dr Egerton, with his Armenian boy Hanna, made an im-

posing party, and excited no small amount of curiosity and speculation in the minds of the passengers on board the P. & O. boat. Lady Haigh was never a woman to do things by halves, and from the moment that she came on board she took by sheer force of character the place she felt was her right, although in the present case it was conceded to her without opposition as soon as it was known who she was.

"Have you noticed," said Charlie Egerton to Cecil, one night in the Red Sea, "that my dear cousin is perceptibly growing taller and more imposing in appearance? Her foot is on her native heath now. This side of Suez we are under the beneficent sway of the Indian Government, and her position is assured, whereas at home she might have been anybody or nobody. You will observe the majesty of her demeanour increase continually, until, when she reaches Baghdad, you will recognise in her every gesture that she represents the Queen-Empress."

"But surely that is Sir Dugald's business?" laughed Cecil.

"Sir Dugald can't do everything. He can't render the Um-ul-Pasha and the other ladies at the Palace the civilities which are imperatively due to them, and he can't conciliate or madden the ladies of the European colony by delicately adjusted hospitalities as she can. If I may say so, Cousin Elma represents the social half of her most gracious Majesty, and Sir Dugald, the Balio Bey as they call him, the administrative half."

"And which is the more important?" asked Cecil.

"Too hard. Ask me another," said Charlie.

"Well, which of them rules the other?" asked Cecil.

"That is a delicate point," returned Charlie, "and

opinions naturally differ; but if you ask me, I should say that Sir Dugald does it in reality, but that Cousin Elma thinks she does, and so both are satisfied."

"Well, I think I should prefer it the other way," said Cecil, meditatively, and Charlie laughed.

"That is exactly what I should have imagined," he said. "But, joking apart, you can see that others consider that Cousin Elma has a right to think a good deal of herself. Look at the people here, for instance. Happily, we have no very big-wigs on board, or there might be trouble. In any case, Cousin Elma, as the wife of a major-general, would carry things with a pretty high hand among the army set, but there would be difficulty with the wives of the bigger civilians. But it's all right with them too now, because Sir Dugald is a political. They know their duty too well to be unpleasant, and besides, it is quite on the cards that Sir Dugald might be useful to any of them any day, if it was desired to find a nice out-of-the-way berth for some unfortunate relative who had fooled away his chances, as Sir Dugald sympathetically remarked to me was my case, the only time I saw him."

If Charlie expected an indignant contradiction, he was disappointed. Cecil looked away over the sea, and smiled involuntarily.

"I was wondering whether you had talked away your chances," she said, for they were on sufficiently intimate terms now to allow of little hits like this.

"That's exactly what I did do," he said. "You may be surprised to hear it, Miss Anstruther, but I have a very inconvenient conscience, especially with regard to the things which other people leave undone. They say that in England abuses are good things on the

whole, because people get up a separate society for the removal of each one, and this affords occupation to many deserving persons; but in the East they're good for a man to come to grief over, and nothing more. If you will only let things alone you're all right, but if you make a fuss it's like fretting your heart out against a stone wall. Why, in my last district—my last failure, if you please—I found there was cholera brewing. I have studied the subject particularly, as I think I have mentioned to you before, but because I could see a little further than the rest of them they called me faddy and an alarmist. I told them what measures ought to be taken, but the man above me, pig-headed old brute! squashed all my representations. If ever a man deserved to be carried off by cholera, that fellow did. At last the cholera came, and I wrote him a letter that he had to attend to. The precautions I had recommended were taken—it was too late, naturally, but we checked the thing before it had gone very far—and I was recommended to resign. Insubordination and so on, of course."

"But were you obliged to be insubordinate?" Cecil ventured to ask.

"No, it was too late, like the precautions. He couldn't pretend to disregard the cholera, but I had to relieve my mind."

"That was a great pity," said Cecil, and would say no more.

CHAPTER VI

A PERIOD OF PROBATION.

AT Karachi there came the first interruption to the smoothness which had hitherto marked the journey. Lady Haigh had expected to be met at this point by the gunboat which was under Sir Dugald's orders, and was generally occupied in patrolling the Shat-el-Arab and the Persian Gulf for the protection of British interests, and she had intended to make a triumphal voyage and entry into Baghdad by its means. But instead of the gunboat there came a telegram from Sir Dugald to say that the services of the *Nausicaa* were imperatively required in the opposite direction, and that the travellers must therefore come on in the ordinary way. Unfortunately, however, they had missed the regular steamer to Basra, and Lady Haigh, who had developed an extraordinary desire to have the journey over, insisted that they should take passage on another that happened to be starting. Charlie Egerton protested loudly against this, declaring that he knew what those wretched coasters were like—ram-shackle old things, creeping along and touching at all sorts of unheard-of ports, and staying for no one knew how long. They would probably reach Basra not a

day sooner than if they had waited for the next steamer; and if they were fated to lose time on the journey, why not spend it at Karachi, and take the opportunity of showing Miss Anstruther a little of India? But here Lady Haigh looked at him with mingled sorrow and impatience, and simply reiterated her determination to press on.

The voyage on the coasting steamer was a new experience to Cecil. The vessel was old, the cargo mixed, the crew also mixed—in fact, everything was mixed but the society, and that was extremely select, since it was confined to their own party. The captain and mate, overawed by the presence of two ladies on board, withdrew themselves as much as possible from the cabin, though they fraternised with Charlie, as every one did, when they could get him alone. Day after day the vessel steamed past the same low shores, with coral-reefs stretching out to sea, and ranges of low hills in the distance behind. Several times, during the first part of the voyage, she touched at queer little towns of square, white, flat-roofed houses, with high towers, where the inhabitants could catch what wind there was, rising up among the feathery date-palms. There were Englishmen at all these places—telegraph officials, clerks, and agents—who talked Anglo-Indian slang, and did their best to render life endurable by all manner of Indian expedients. After this there was a considerable stretch of coast without any port, and the captain and mate developed an inclination to take things easily and to let the ship look after herself. The first result of this was that the steamer ran ashore one night, taking the ground quite quietly and gently on a reef connected with an archipelago of small islands. The captain blamed the mate, whose watch on deck it was;

the mate blamed the captain, who knew these waters better than he did; and both united in blaming the steersman, the charts, and the compass. The blame having been thus equitably distributed, the belligerents agreed to bury the hatchet and try and get the ship off; and as it appeared to be necessary to shift the cargo for this purpose, tents were constructed for the passengers on the nearest island. To these they were very glad to retreat, for the ship had heeled over to such a degree that the floor of the cabins was a steep slope, at the foot of which everything from the other side of the room gradually collected.

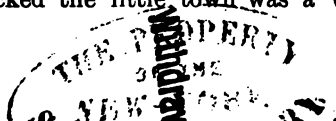
Here, then, on this nameless island, with its palm-trees and its spring of water, were all the materials for a latter-day idyll. A shipwreck, a desert island, a prolonged picnic, everything was complete, and yet one or two things spoilt it altogether, so that the episode would scarcely be worth mentioning save to show how Lady Haigh's schemes went wrong. Charlie did not fail to remind her that he had counselled her to wait at Karachi, and pointed out that she, at any rate, would have been much more comfortable there. Their desert island was so far complete that there was even a likelihood of pirates in its neighbourhood, although Cecil, who had a robust and healthy faith in the past exploits of the British navy, and in the *Pax Britannica* established in Indian waters at this period of the century, could never be brought to believe that Charlie was doing more than trying to frighten her when he mentioned them. The greatest drawback to the place was its extreme smallness. There could be no exciting explorations, journeys made in single file through dense forests right into the heart of the island, because there was no forest and so very little island. There could

be no hope of discovering volcanoes, caves, traces of previous inhabitants, wild beasts, or any other common-places of desert-island travel, because there was no room for them. If Lady Haigh was in her tent and wanted Cecil, she knew that she must be either sitting in the shade outside, or standing under the palm-trees looking out to sea, for there was nowhere else. Again, there were no hardships—not even the semblance of any. The ladies were not so much as obliged to make their own beds, for, besides their two maids, there was one of the ship's stewards, a Zanzibari boy, who was always on shore at their service. On board this luckless youth was perpetually falling from the rigging or into the hold, and he was sent on land to keep him from doing any more damage to himself or to other people. No doubt it would be pretty and idyllic to describe how Charlie Egerton picked up sticks and lighted the fire in order that Cecil might prepare the breakfast, but it would not be true; for, in the first place, there were no sticks, but a portable stove brought from the vessel, which burned petroleum; and, in the second place, the ship's cook was still responsible for the meals. In fine, this was a shipwreck with all the modern improvements.

Perhaps it was this fact which rendered the relations of the castaways different from those usually observed under such circumstances. The crew did not go off in the boats, abandoning the vessel and the passengers, nor did they broach the rum-casks. They worked as hard and were as obliging and respectful as before, and brought queer fishes and shells for the ladies to see when they found them. When the captain and mate walked along the reef at night to what was still called the "cabin dinner," they still ate in silence, and when

the meal was over, the mate felt it his duty at once to go and see what the men were doing, and when he did not come back, the captain invariably went to see what was keeping him, and did not come back either. As for the men, they appeared in great force on Sunday evening, when hymns were to be sung, and again one week-day, when a concert was got up after work was over, the sailors in their clean clothes, with very shiny faces and very smooth hair, and the Lascars in gorgeous raiment of all the colours of the rainbow, but otherwise the passengers saw less of them than they had done on shipboard.

The archipelago to which the desert island belonged was not all uninhabited. There were two good-sized islands in it which supported a considerable population, and the castaways made two expeditions to the larger of these. The people were all bigoted Moslems, who testified extreme horror at the sight of the unveiled faces of Lady Haigh and Cecil, and regarded the whole party with feelings of lively disapprobation. Their own women were wrapped up from top to toe whenever they ventured out of doors, and their faces were additionally protected by a thick horse-hair mask, so that it is possible that it was the discomfort of this arrangement which made the men fear a domestic rebellion as the result of the visit of the Frangi ladies. For the rest, the islanders lived a good deal on fish, and apparently also threw away a good deal, and dried a considerable quantity for future consumption, which made their streets unpleasantly odoriferous, and there were few attractions in their surroundings to counterbalance this defect, until, in extending the area of their observations, Cecil and Charlie made a great discovery. Lying among the hills which backed the little town was a valley filled



with prehistoric ruins, and beyond this again an ancient cemetery. To Cecil this find was as a trumpet-call to utilise her detention in a way which would command the gratitude of the learned world by demonstrating, possibly finally, the real origin of the Phœnicians, and Charlie required little persuasion to induce him to help her. Accordingly, they returned to the island the next day, prepared for business. Photography was not practised then as it is now, but Cecil intended to sketch the ruins, and Charlie was to hire natives to begin excavations under his direction. Unfortunately, these proceedings did not meet the views of the inhabitants. To them it appeared certain that the strangers were going to search for hidden treasure, with the necessary result of exposing the island to the wrath of the defrauded ghostly guardians of the spoil, and they expressed their dissent so strongly that the baffled explorers were thankful to be able to return to their boat in safety, the people hurling maledictions and more substantial missiles after them. This is the reason why, so far as Cecil is concerned, the Phœnician problem remains still unsolved.

"I could soon make friends with those island fellows if I had them by myself," remarked Charlie as they rowed away, with rather a wistful look back at the shore.

"But, my dear boy, why don't you, then?" cried Lady Haigh, with marked inhospitality. "Go over by yourself and live among them until we get the ship off. We could easily let you know when we were ready to start, and we should get on quite well without you."

"Yes, do go if you would rather," said Cecil.

"It's likely, isn't it?" was his sole reply, and no more was said. Under ordinary circumstances, Lady

Haigh felt sure, he would have been off to those islanders for a week or a month, even though it had involved the sacrifice of all his interests in life. and the fact that he did not succumb to their attractions now showed that there was some very potent influence at work to detain him. What that influence was, Lady Haigh had no difficulty in guessing. Charlie's behaviour as his cousin's escort had been most exemplary, but she did not flatter herself that it was her society he sought. Charlie could never have been anything but a gentleman, but the assiduous way in which he had attended upon Cecil and herself since they had left Cairo bespoke something more than mere politeness. He had found out the way to catch Cecil's attention now, and he used it. He was full of the most enthralling anecdotes and stories, narratives of his own adventures, and accounts of the queer people he had met in his wanderings, and he proved that his tales were as potent to interest a graduate of London University as a knot of listeners in a Cairo coffee-house. It was he who, by his extraordinary yarns, whiled away the long days on the island; and they were very long sometimes, for both ladies were anxious to reach their journey's end, and chafed somewhat at the enforced detention. Happily there was no fear that the interruption to their voyage would cause anxiety to their friends, for the ways of the coasting steamers were known to be so erratic that no one would think of theirs as missing for a long time, and by that time they would probably have been picked up by the next regular steamer from Karachi; but to Cecil, who was nervously anxious to get to her work, the delay was a weary one. Under these circumstances Charlie's power of discoursing for hours together came

as a great relief. Cecil laughed at him in public, and in private teased him occasionally, in a dignified way, about his extraordinary flow of conversation; and yet felt, though she never confessed it to herself, that Baghdad would not be quite the land of exile she had pictured it, and endured the long delay very philosophically on the whole.

"I really think that Azim Bey will be grown up by the time I reach Baghdad," she said one day, when the crew had been patiently shifting and reshifting the cargo for some time without producing any perceptible effect on the ship's position.

"Are you afraid of getting out of practice, Miss Anstruther?" inquired Charlie. "Because I shouldn't a bit mind your keeping your hand in by teaching me a little. We could get up a stunning schoolroom by putting one of those flat rocks for a blackboard, and you could instil some mental philosophy and moral science into me. They never could make me learn any when I was a boy, and all I've picked up since is entirely practical and quite contrary to all received rules, so that I should be glad to learn how to think properly."

"Nonsense, Charlie," said Lady Haigh, wagging her head wisely; "Miss Anstruther is anxious to get to her proper work, and doesn't want to waste her time on you. If you really want to please her, help the men to get the ship off, so that we can go on again."

"Cruel, cruel woman!" he cried. "No sentiment about Cousin Elma, is there, Miss Anstruther? Well, after that, if my humble efforts can do anything, we shall not be here much longer, though the mate did remark airily, when I offered to help, that they didn't want any landsmen meddling about. But at any rate,

if we wait two or three months longer, we must be picked up by the mail."

As it happened, the mail came in sight that very evening, and at once hove to in answer to the signals from the stranded ship. By the united efforts of the two crews the coaster was got off, and at length proceeded on her way, to the great joy of the majority of her passengers. With Charlie Egerton, however, it was otherwise, for not only did he regret the pleasant time which was past, but there was a look in Lady Haigh's eye now and then which betokened a lecture in store, and as he guessed what would be the subject of this, he made it his constant endeavour to avoid it.

"I really feel quite sorry to leave our island now, don't you, Lady Haigh?" asked Cecil, as they stood on deck, watching the tops of the palm-trees disappear beneath the horizon. "Our life there has been so quiet, a sort of pause between our hurry in starting and the new work to which we are going."

"Nonsense, my dear Cecil; you are just like a cat. You can't bear to be moved," said Lady Haigh, with more force than politeness. "There are some people who would grow sentimental on leaving a prison, if they had only been there long enough."

Such impatience was so rare with Lady Haigh that Cecil sank into an awed silence, and sentimentalised no more over the island. The second part of the voyage proved to be as safe and pleasant as the first part had been disastrous, and the captain was merciful enough to make only short halts at Bushire and Mohammerah. When Basra was reached, it was found that the services of the gunboat were not yet available, and as there was little in the town, half-busy and half-ruinous, to allure to a longer stay, Lady Haigh

swallowed her pride sufficiently to let Charlie take passage for the party in one of the steamers plying to Baghdad. They were again the only passengers, and were accorded a sort of semi-royal honour which amused the two younger members of the party very much, but which seemed only natural to Lady Haigh. The river voyage was very pleasant, especially when they left behind the Shat-el-Arab, which was scarcely to be distinguished from the sea, and entered the Tigris. Villages half hidden in forests of palm, long rows of black Bedouin tents pitched in the more open spaces, and the people themselves, wild and suspicious enough, but rudely prosperous and in a way well-dressed, afforded constant interest to Cecil. Even better was the distant view of the mountains of Luristan, which was obtained about mid-way in the journey, the lofty summits covered with perpetual snow towering above the nearer expanse of feathery green and the swiftly flowing river at its foot. Cecil sat so long trying in vain to reproduce in a sketch the full effect of the contrast that she worked on into the twilight, and was forced at last to desist with a headache. Upon discovering this fact, Charlie showed himself so assiduous in moving her deck-chair about for her, and in trying to arrange her cushions more comfortably, that the sight seemed to irritate Lady Haigh.

"My dear," she said at last to Cecil, "you will never be better on deck here. You are tired out. Go to bed at once, and then you will wake up fresh and well to-morrow."

Cecil smiled an assent, and after wishing the others good night, disappeared into her cabin. Lady Haigh waited impatiently until she had been gone some little time.

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"Charlie," she said at last, in a low voice, "I want to speak to you."

"Yes, Cousin Elma?" he made answer, without any suspicious show of alacrity. "What a start you gave me, though! I was thinking."

"What about?" asked Lady Haigh, sharply. Then, as his eyes involuntarily sought the direction in which Cecil had disappeared, "The usual subject, I suppose? Charlie, I always foretold that when you did fall in love you would go in very far indeed, but I didn't guess how far it would be. This is what comes of not caring for ladies' society."

"Exactly. One lady is enough for me," he returned — "present company always excepted, Cousin Elma, of course. But seriously, did you ever know any one like Miss Anstruther?"

"Now we are well launched into the subject on which I wished to speak to you," said Lady Haigh. "Allow me, Charlie, as being in a certain sense Miss Anstruther's guardian, to ask you your intentions?"

"To speak to her to-morrow if I can only get her alone, and marry her as soon as possible, if she will have me," he replied, promptly.

"So I thought. Well, Charlie, all I have to say is that you are to do nothing of the kind, however often you may manage to see her alone."

"Really, Cousin Elma, I believe that Miss Anstruther is of age, and capable of managing her own affairs."

"Don't put on that high and mighty manner, Charlie. I am advising you for your good and hers. Do you know anything of the footing on which Miss Anstruther stands here?"

"Once or twice she has mentioned some sort of

agreement to remain a certain time, but I imagine it would not be difficult to get that set aside."

"My dear boy, that is all you know about it! Miss Anstruther is solemnly pledged to remain in this situation for two years. In some sort of way, I am her security for doing so. Now, I ask you, as an honourable man, would you be acting rightly if you induced her to break this agreement, or could you respect her if she showed herself willing to break it in order to marry a man of whose very existence she was not aware when she signed it?"

"Very well, Cousin Elma. I will be satisfied with a two years' engagement, then."

"You will have nothing of the sort with which to be satisfied, Charlie. I will not allow you to speak to Miss Anstruther until the two years are over. Then, if you like, you can say what you want to say before she signs the second agreement to serve for three years more. I will leave the matter in her hands then, and you shall have your chance, but you are not to speak to her now."

"And may I ask the reason of this extraordinary prohibition?"

Charlie's tone was dogged and haughty, but Lady Haigh answered unflinchingly.

"Consider, my dear boy. Let us suppose first that Cecil accepts you. You know that she is in a very delicate position, and will need in any case to walk very warily. You know what the Baghdadis are, you know the miserable scandals which circulate so wonderfully among the foreign colony in such a town as this. To have her name connected with yours would at once destroy all the poor girl's chances of success, while afterwards her position will be more assured and she

will know better what she is doing. Leave her in peace for these two years, Charlie; surely it is not such a very great thing to do for her sake? It is important for her to obtain her salary undiminished, too. You will see her once a-week at least, so you will know that she is well and happy, but don't disturb her in her work by trying to make her fond of you."

"What next?" cried Charlie. "But you know she might refuse me, Cousin Elma. What then?"

"I think it is most probable that she would. She takes an interest in you, Charlie, but I don't believe she cares for you at all in the way you want. Well, you know that she is to spend Sunday at the Residency whenever she is at Baghdad. Now do you think that she would find any peace and comfort in her Sundays if she were always obliged to meet a rejected lover with reproachful eyes? You would make her life a burden to her."

"I might go away," he murmured, dolefully enough, for it is one thing to despair of your own chances, and quite another to have them pronounced hopeless by some one else.

"Yes; and sacrifice your prospects irretrievably just as Sir Dugald has got you this post, in the hope that you would do better here with him than you have hitherto. I suppose you would intend such a move as a gentle intimation to poor Miss Anstruther that your ruin lay at her door? No, don't be furious, my dear boy; I only say it looks like it. You would go away with some of those wild Arabs or Kurds, I presume; but would that be much better than living a civilised life at Baghdad, and seeing Cecil every Sunday?"

"You are too horribly practical and calculating,

Cousin Elma. Not to speak to her for two years is dreadful. How can I stand it?"

"It's better than being refused, at any rate," said Lady Haigh. "But you know, Charlie, I can't promise that she will listen to you then, even if she has learnt to care for you. She is a very conscientious girl, and quite feels, I believe, that she has a special mission here."

"Hang missions!" cried Charlie, rebelliously. "Pretty girls have no business with them. Why can't they leave them to ugly old women?"

"Like myself, I suppose?" said Lady Haigh. "Thank you, Charlie—no, don't apologise. Well, you see if Cecil believes that she has a mission to finish Azim Bey's education, she will probably feel bound to continue it for the five years specified. If she thinks it her duty, I believe she will do it."

"So do I," said Charlie, seriously. "I had rather not be weighed in the scale against Miss Anstruther's duty. I'm afraid I should go to the wall. But five years, Cousin Elma! Do you know how old I shall be then?"

"Nonsense!" cried Lady Haigh; "what's five years at your time of life? It's we old people who can't spare it. Why, anything may happen in five years."

A good deal was to happen, more than either Charlie or Lady Haigh anticipated.

"Well," said Charlie, "at least I shall see her once a-week. I must live on that, I suppose, and endure the rest of my time. Now, Cousin Elma, I have listened to you a good deal, so you must just listen to me a moment. Did you ever know a girl like her, so sweet and gentle, and so awfully good? I believe she could do anything she liked with me, and she doesn't see it

a bit. You know what I mean; she doesn't seem to understand compliments, she always wants to talk sense. And the worst of it is, that whatever I say now she never thinks I'm in earnest. I know it's my fault; you've told me over and over again not to talk so fast, but I can't help it when—well, when I particularly want to make a good impression, you know, and now she won't take me seriously. And I don't want her to think that I am always playing the fool,—what can I do?"

"If you ask me," said Lady Haigh, "I think it is a very good thing, for your own sake, that you have now two years in which to show Cecil that you really are in earnest. She has always taken life very seriously, so that you are rather a new experience to her, you see; but I think she is beginning to understand you better, if that is any comfort to you."

"Thanks awfully, Cousin Elma. I know it's all my own fault. You mustn't think I want to reflect on her. She's unique, but she's absolutely perfect."

"Oh, Charlie, Charlie, you are a sad fellow!" cried Lady Haigh. "Now, good night."

CHAPTER VII.

"IN INMOST BAGDAT."

"MY last day of this!" said Charlie to himself the next morning, as he went on deck. It was a sad thought, and he tried hard to be duly miserable, but the morning was so fine and the air so clear that he could not help whistling, in a sort of sympathy with nature; and then Cecil came on deck, looking as bright and fresh as the day, her headache all gone, and it became his duty to invite her to join him in a promenade, since the morning was a little chilly. It was impossible to feel melancholy long under such circumstances, and he soon found himself rattling away in his usual style, and predicting all kinds of delightful times at Baghdad. Lady Haigh, having once declared her pleasure, had perfect confidence in Charlie's sense of honour, and was even a little sorry for him, and therefore she did not declare that she and Cecil were busy, and send him off to talk to the captain, a perverse habit which she had developed of late, but allowed him to remain beside her, and instruct Cecil in the habits and folk-lore of the wild tribes on the river-banks. Thus the day passed pleasantly until, towards evening, Cecil, who was looking ahead, uttered a cry of delight as the

steamer swung round a bend in the river. Before them lay Baghdad, bathed in the sunset light, which brought out in all their brilliance the green and turquoise hues of the tiles with which the domes of the mosques were inlaid, and the gilded casing of the minarets; while other buildings, ordinarily most prosaic and unlovely, looked mysterious and beautiful rising from the sea of foliage which everywhere surrounded them. Palm, orange, and pomegranate trees filled the gardens which spread over the flat country as far as eye could reach, and even the ruined walls of the city, emerging here and there from the expanse of green, lost their meanness and looked imposing.

"This is really Baghdad!" said Cecil, with a sigh of contentment.

"And I am sure you are longing to walk through the enchanted streets," said Charlie.

"Of course," said Cecil. "When do we land, Lady Haigh? Is it soon?"

"Naturally, the steamer will stop opposite the Residency for us to land," said Lady Haigh with dignity. "Don't worry about your things, my dear child. Um Yusuf will see to them, and if you really like to look at Baghdad, it's a pity you shouldn't."

They had reached the city now, and were passing between terraced gardens, with elaborate gateways leading to the water, and queer, brightly-painted boats bobbing about in the current. There were fanciful summer-houses in some of the gardens, and Cecil strained her eyes to catch a glimpse of the veiled beauties who ought to be reclining gracefully in the shade. Then came a more crowded quarter, with old mansions of brown brick overhanging the water, coffee-houses with highly decorated gables and terraces where

companies of men were sitting smoking and talking, newer-looking dwellings with latticed balconies, and trees—trees everywhere. Cecil gazed on in breathless admiration, but her raptures were suddenly interrupted.

"There's the dear old rag!" cried Lady Haigh, in an ecstasy of mingled patriotism and affection, and Charlie Egerton took off his hat to the Union-Jack which floated over the Residency. Cecil awoke from her dream with a start. The steamer was slowing down as it approached a great house, standing at the end of a long garden, with a terrace overlooking the water, and an avenue of aged orange-trees. The flag scarcely fluttered in the light breeze, and all the garden looked dreamlike and peaceful. Only on the terrace was there a certain amount of bustle, and presently a boat put forth from the steps and shot towards the steamer. From the pomp and circumstance which characterised this embarkation, Cecil divined that the boat carried Sir Dugald Haigh, and she began to feel rather nervous. It would be idle to deny that Charlie's conversation had infected her with a certain amount of prejudice against her Majesty's Consul-General at Baghdad. For this very reason she had resolved to meet him with an exaggeratedly open mind, and to look very carefully for his good points. After all, Lady Haigh's early devotion and long affection ought to weigh more than Dr Egerton's dislike, especially since he was so notoriously addicted to disagreeing with his superiors.

With this in her mind, Cecil stood observant in the background while Sir Dugald gained the deck and greeted his wife. She saw a thin, almost insignificant-looking man, with a skin like parchment, and a small, carefully-trimmed grey moustache. In his dress there

was visible a precision so extreme as almost to appear affectation, and his manners were the perfection of elaborate politeness. Sir Dugald Haigh at Baghdad was eminently the right man in the right place. The Indian authorities who appointed him knew that he would never wantonly or ignorantly outrage the prejudices nor shock the susceptibilities of the most jealous and sensitive oriental; but they knew also, and rejoiced in the knowledge, that under the silken glove the iron hand was always ready. Sir Dugald could insist and threaten when it was necessary—nay, he could even bluster, in a dignified and most effective way—and the Pashas and Sheikhs with whom he had to deal knew that, when he had once put his foot down, they might as well try to shake the Great Pyramid as to move him.

Something of all this Cecil read in her cursory observation of him, but she had only time to hear Charlie's muttered remark, "The very incarnation of red tape!" before she found herself summoned forward by Lady Haigh.

"And this is Miss Anstruther!" said Sir Dugald, as he bowed and shook hands. There was nothing offensive about the remark—it expressed a kindly interest, possibly admiration—but Cecil saw Sir Dugald raise his eyebrows very slightly as he uttered it. Before long she was to learn to watch his eyebrows narrowly, for they were the most expressive feature of his face, betraying all the feelings of worry, impatience, amusement, or concern, which the rest of his visage was under much too good control to show. Now they said, "Far too young! Not nearly backbone enough for such a place!" while Sir Dugald's lips were saying—

"Welcome to Baghdad, Miss Anstruther! It is a

long time since we have had the honour of a young lady's company at the Residency."

Then he greeted Charlie, with a courteous ease of manner, and a kindly expression of a hope that he had come to stay this time, which made Cecil decide that if the hope should not be fulfilled, the provocation would come from Charlie's side and not from Sir Dugald's; and then they went on shore. The Residency proved to be a fine old house, built round two courtyards, which, as Charlie told Cecil, corresponded to the account he had given her of the special functions of Sir Dugald and Lady Haigh, since one was devoted to business and the other to social purposes. The ground-floor rooms in the family courtyard were low and dark, but those on the floor above them large and airy, with broad verandahs supported on curiously carved wooden pillars. Cecil, casting a hurried glance in at the various doors as Lady Haigh took her to her room, carried away a confused memory of fretted ceilings inlaid with coloured marbles, walls panelled with looking-glasses, and gilded mouldings, and again she sighed with satisfaction. The Baghdad of good Haroun-al-Raschid had not quite disappeared yet.

Immediately after breakfast the next morning, Cecil was summoned to the drawing-room to receive a messenger from the Pasha. This proved to be Ovannes Effendi, his Excellency's secretary, a clever-looking young Armenian with a marvellous gift of tongues. He proffered his employer's felicitations on mademoiselle's safe arrival, inquired anxiously whether she had an agreeable journey, and concluded by entreating that she would take up her abode in the Palace at her earliest convenience.

"Let me see," said Lady Haigh—"this is Saturday.

We can't let you go before Monday morning, Cecil, but you and I will go and pay our respects to the Palace ladies this afternoon."

Having received his answer, Ovannes Effendi retired, after formally presenting Lady Haigh and Cecil, in the Pasha's name, with several trays of fruit and sweetmeats which had been carried after him by a corresponding number of porters. The idea was so thoroughly oriental that Cecil forgot the untempting nature of the sweetmeats to a Western taste, and noted the little attention joyfully in her diary. It was evident that the Pasha, at any rate, was anxious to do all in his power to show her that she was a welcome guest; but when they prepared for their visit to the harem that afternoon, she found that Lady Haigh entertained distinct misgivings as to their reception by the ladies.

"It is our duty to pay them a formal call, my dear," she said, vigorously completing an elaborate toilet the while. "I have no doubt that that horrid woman, the Um-ul-Pasha, will give us a bad half-hour, but it is better that I should be there to help you to face her."

To get to the Palace it was necessary to mount ridiculously small donkeys, which picked their way carefully among the inequalities and mud-heaps of the narrow winding streets; while a small army of servants, headed by two gorgeous cavasses in gold-embroidered liveries, who kept back the crowd with whips, gave the occasion the dignity which would otherwise have been sorely wanting to it. It was irritating, if not exactly disappointing, to find on reaching the Palace that all this grandeur had been wasted, since the answer returned to their inquiries by the stout negro who kept the door of the harem, after long colloquies with an

invisible maid-servant within, who was apparently displaying an undue eagerness to catch a glimpse of the Frangi ladies, was that the Um-ul-Pasha was indisposed, and that visitors were therefore not received in the harem that day.

"That is all her spite," said Lady Haigh, as they picked their way back to their donkeys. "She is no more ill than I am. If she had been indisposed this morning, Ovannes Effendi would have known it, and told us not to come, but now she thinks she has slighted you, and given me a slap in the face. Very well, Nazleh Khanum, we shall see!"

But here, just as they were about to mount, Ovannes Effendi overtook them, and after expressing the Pasha's sorrow that their trouble should have been in vain, begged them to honour his Excellency's poor abode by deigning to rest for a few minutes, assuring them that his employer would be much hurt if they did not. On Lady Haigh's acquiescence, he ushered them into a large room furnished in European style, where they found their old acquaintance, Denarien Bey, talking to a very stout gentleman in a very tight frock-coat and a fez. Lady Haigh's salaam warned Cecil that this was Ahmed Khémi Pasha himself, and she imitated her friend's reverence as faithfully as she could when she was brought forward and presented. The Pasha was all politeness, evidently anxious to atone for his mother's incivility, and insisted on sending for coffee and sherbet at once. While the refreshments were being consumed, he kept up a slow and stately conversation with Lady Haigh respecting the journey, pausing with special care to compose each sentence before uttering it. It was evident that he had had a purpose in view in inviting them in, for presently he

noddod to Denarien Bey, who took up the conversation in his turn. Lady Haigh told Cecil afterwards that this was because the Pasha now disliked intensely speaking French, and was by no means a master of English, which he was yet too proud to speak badly.

"His Excellency's heart is much rejoiced by this happy meeting, mademoiselle," said Denarien Bey; "since he can now impress upon you certain cautions which you will find all-important in your new sphere."

"I will do my best to conform to his Excellency's wishes," murmured Cecil, nervously.

"First, as regards your own position, mademoiselle. You are aware that the state of public opinion here obliges you and your pupil always to remain in the harem while you are at the Palace, while yet it is from the harem that the gravest dangers threaten the life of Azim Bey." He glanced rather fearfully at the Pasha as he said this, but meeting only a nod of acquiescence, went on. "It has therefore been arranged, mademoiselle, that the quarters occupied by yourself, the Bey, and your attendants, shall be in a separate courtyard, to which none but yourselves shall have access. Thus, while technically in the harem, you will in reality be separated from it, and the door will be guarded by a negro called Aga Masûd, who was the faithful attendant of the Bey's late mother. His special duty will be to prevent the entrance of emissaries from the harem. It is his Excellency's most earnest wish that Azim Bey should never cross the threshold of the harem but in your charge, and that while there you should never let him out of your sight. The slaves are not to be trusted."

He said this apologetically, and as if in explanation. but Cecil knew that he was pointing at much more

exalted persons than the slaves. It was the Um-ul-Pasha and his Excellency's wives who were not to be trusted with the life of the boy so nearly related to them, and she began to feel more than ever the great responsibility of her post. After a few more unimportant remarks, Lady Haigh rose to go, but the Pasha detained her, begging Cecil also to remain.

"I have sent for my son," he said, "and I hear him coming."

As he spoke, there appeared in the doorway a small thin boy, looking like a miniature edition of the Pasha in his long black coat, with his dark, solemn, old little face surmounted by the usual tasselled cap. When he saw Cecil, his expression brightened suddenly.

"*C'est enfin Mdlle. Antaza!*" he cried, in an ecstasy of delight, and he ran forward and salaamed, raising her hand to her lips. The Pasha interposed, and reminded him to salute Lady Haigh, which he did, and then retired behind his father's chair, watching Cecil all the while with grave, unchildlike eyes.

"You will come soon, mademoiselle?" he said entreatingly as they took their leave. "When my father is busy I have no one now."

"Mademoiselle is coming on Monday, Bey," said Lady Haigh kindly, and the boy looked somewhat comforted. With his father and Denarien Bey he escorted the two ladies to the gate, and they rode home quietly, Cecil pondering over what she had seen of the Pasha and his little son. But it was strange how completely the Residency was like home to her already. It seemed to be a bit of England, and when once she had crossed its threshold again, the Palace and its occupants were like the fabric of a dream, while Sir Dugald, Charlie Egerton, and one or two Englishmen who happened to be passing

through Baghdad, and were staying at the Residency, took their places.

"Well, what do you think of our friend Sir Hector Stubble?" Charlie asked her that evening, when they were sitting out on the verandah after dinner.

"I suppose you mean Sir Dugald," said Cecil, "and I don't like the name. I think Lord Stratford de Redcliffe was a splendid man, and I never can forgive Grenville Murray for drawing him so unfairly. I suppose the fact is that he saw him in the light of his own grievances, just as you look at Sir Dugald through the medium of your prejudice."

"Not a prejudice, Miss Anstruther, honestly not," said Charlie. "We are antagonistic by nature, and we rub each other the wrong way already. You would scarcely think we had had time to have words together yet, would you?"

"Already?" said Cecil. "It's absurd!"

"Well," said Charlie, "I told him that the hospital was quite behind the times, and horribly short of stores, and he as good as refused to do anything to it."

"Possibly," said Cecil, "he did not relish the stores being demanded in a your-money-or-your-life sort of tone." Charlie laughed uncomfortably.

"You always contrive to put me in the wrong, Miss Anstruther. The fact is, he said one ought to be very careful with public money, and that he was not prepared to sanction the expenditure of any more at present. Then the prison, it is not in a particularly sanitary condition——"

"But that can't be Sir Dugald's fault," objected Cecil.

"Oh, I don't mean the town prison; I haven't been poaching on the Pasha's preserves just yet. I mean

our private prison here, in the Residency. Now, Miss Anstruther, don't say that you will never be able to dine here again in peace, on account of the shrieks of tortured victims ringing in your ears in the pauses in the conversation. The place isn't so bad as all that. In fact, I daresay it's a model jail, as things are here."

"And you forget that you are in your beloved unchanging East, where no one makes any reforms," said Cecil. "I am very sorry that you have taken this prejudice against Sir Dugald. I think he is a delightful man, and so kind."

"How could he be otherwise than kind to you?" Charlie wished to know. "It is to his unfortunate subordinates that he shows his other side."

"And I have no doubt they deserve it," retorted Cecil, crushingly. "I do hope you will try to get on with him, and not start with the idea that you are bound to quarrel with him, because you have got on badly with your superiors before. If you are determined to bring about a dispute, I suppose it will certainly come, no matter how forbearing Sir Dugald may be, but that is not a very wise spirit in which to set to work. Surely you must see it yourself, don't you? This is really an excellent chance for you, you know, and Lady Haigh will be dreadfully disappointed if you throw it away."

"Oh, I mean to stick to the place," said Charlie eagerly, somewhat to Cecil's surprise. "I do really intend to stay on, unless I am driven away. But you must let me have the privilege of telling my woes to you, Miss Anstruther, and getting a lecture in return. I take to lectures as a duck takes to water; you ask Cousin Elma."

Cecil laughed, and as Lady Haigh came just then to

ask her to sing, she had no more talk with Charlie. The next day was her first Sunday in Baghdad, the prototype of nearly all her Sundays for five years. There was an English service, conducted by Mr Schad, the colleague of Dr Yehudi in his mission-work among the Jews, and Cecil felt that she had never fully appreciated the beauty of the Liturgy until she heard it read, with a strong German accent, in this far land. It took her back to her father's beautiful church at Whitcliffe, and to the dingy and ornate edifice in a city street, which she had attended in her school-days, and it linked her with the services held in both places to-day. She treasured every hour of that Sunday, which slipped by all too quickly, and left her to face the duties and responsibilities of her new position.

On the Monday morning she dressed herself, with great reluctance, in her official costume, lamenting that she could not wear European dress, as she might have done without difficulty in Constantinople or Smyrna. But, after all, the long loose gown, falling straight from the shoulders, and only caught in at the waist with a striped sash, would be very comfortable in the hot weather, though the wide, trailing sleeves would be dreadfully in the way. What Cecil disliked most in the costume was the head-dress, a little round cap, with a gauze veil, which could be brought over the face in case of need, depending from it behind. To wear this it was necessary that the hair should be plaited in a number of little tails, and allowed to hang down, since any arrangement of coils must interfere either with the cap or with the flow of the veil. For outdoor wear there was provided a huge linen wrapper, which enveloped the wearer from head to foot, but Cecil had resolutely refused to don the hideous horse-

hair mask worn under this by the Baghdadi ladies. The absurdity of her appearance so overcame her while dressing, that she projected a caricature of herself for the benefit of the children at home; but even then she did not realise the difficulty of shuffling through the courtyard in her yellow slippers, and of mounting the donkey which was waiting for her. Lady Haigh had mercifully got all the gentlemen out of the way; but her own mirth was contagious, and she and Cecil relapsed into little explosions of laughter several times in the street.

Arrived at the Palace, they were conducted to a miniature courtyard, the buildings around which bore traces of having been lately painted and done up. The gate occupied the greater part of one side, guarded by the faithful Mastûd, a gigantic and particularly ugly negro. The rooms on the other three sides were like those at the Residency, low and mean-looking on the ground-floor, but large and lofty above.

"The apartments of Azim Bey," said their guide, a tall Circassian woman who spoke French, with a wave of her hand towards the rooms on the right; "the apartments of mademoiselle," indicating those on the left; "the Bey Effendi's study and reception-room," showing that in the middle.

"We will look at your rooms, Cecil," said Lady Haigh, and they mounted the stairs leading to the verandah. The "apartments" were three in number, and comprised a bedroom and sitting-room for Cecil, and a bedroom for Um Yusuf, opening out of her mistress's. Another staircase led from the verandah to the roof, which was flat and surrounded by a parapet, with several orange-trees in great pots to give shade in hot weather.

"But you won't be able to stay up here when it is really hot, Cecil," said Lady Haigh, "except just at night. You will have to spend the day in the cellars. We do it ourselves—every one does in Baghdad—and it's not often that the thermometer is more than 88° down there."

They descended from the roof and entered the rooms. The bedroom furniture was evidently a "complete suite," of the most highly-polished mahogany, imported from Europe at some trouble and expense. The things in the sitting-room were of the same style, but one or two chairs seemed not to have survived the journey, for their places were filled by a common Windsor arm-chair, and a very ornate Louis XV. *fanteuil*, with gilded and twisted legs. On a side-table was a gorgeous gilt clock, which did not go, and the walls were decorated with fearful oleographs, and one or two theatrical portraits, which the guide pointed out with great pride.

"Well, Cecil, my dear," said Lady Haigh, sitting down in the gilt chair, while the two servants retired into the verandah. "I think you will be very comfortable here. I see that they have forgotten one or two things, but I will send you those from the Residency. I am very glad that you have Basmeh Kalfa to superintend your little household. She was head *kalfa* (which means an upper slave) to Azim Bey's mother, so she will look after you well. You will have to be careful just at first, until you get into the ways of the place. Be sure if you ever come to the Residency in European dress to put on that sheet over it. It will pass muster in the streets. And do mind never to go outside your own courtyard without the sheet on. This place is your castle, you know, and

not even the Pasha dare put his nose in without your consent. If you should hear rather a commotion at the gate, and Masûd comes striding along, shouting *Dastâr! Dastâr!* at the top of his voice, pull your veil over your face at once. *Dastâr* means "custom," and is the warning that a man is coming. It will probably be the Pasha coming to see how the Bey is getting on with his lessons, or some old man who comes to teach him the Koran, but be sure you remember. And, my dearest child, you must never go anywhere without Um Yusuf. She must be always with you—in lesson-time, recreation, coming to us, everything. You must never be impatient, and think she is spying upon you. It is her duty to keep you always in sight, and she knows it. And now I must be going. Basmeh Kalfa, I leave Mademoiselle Antaza and her nurse in your charge. Take care of them."

"Upon my head be it, O my lady," responded Basmeh Kalfa, impassively.

CHAPTER VIII

A PROPOSAL OF MARRIAGE

Y HAIGH was gone, and Cecil felt very desolate. Everything seemed so new and strange, and she was far removed from every familiar face, except the serene and respectable one of Um Yusuf, that she almost inclined to sit down and mourn over her situation, but she had too much to do. With Um Yusuf's help she set to work to unpack her possessions, speedily found that the proceeding was an object of interest to the other denizens of the courtyard. When Kalfa took a seat on the floor uninvited, made remarks on the things as they were lifted, and Ayesha, Azim Bey's nurse, who was also a well-known person, came across from the building opposite, and posted herself in an advantageous position. Lying on the verandah were several black women, under-servants of the establishment, who had forsaken their work and come to see the show; and Mas'ud himself was hard put to it to restrain his curiosity sufficiently to keep his post at the gate. None of the interested watchers offered to help in any way, but all commented audibly on the strange things they saw, especially on the books and photographs. They

were particularly amazed and delighted by the transformation effected in the sitting-room with the help of a hammer and nails, some folding book-shelves, a bracket or two, and some extra pictures, and it began to look quite habitable to Cecil herself. There were still two or three large cases containing the books and school-appliances which had been ordered for Azim Bey to be unpacked, and she went with Um Yusuf, attended by her admiring train, to see whether there was any place for their contents in the room pointed out by Basmeh Kalfa as the Bey's "study." Here there was a raised dais, occupying about half the floor, and covered with a rich Kurdish carpet, the lower part of the room being matted. On the dais was the divan, covered with thick silk, and amply furnished with cushions of various sizes. There were two or three little inlaid octagonal tables scattered about, but no other furniture, and the walls were decorated with arabesque designs and inscriptions from the Koran. To desecrate such a room with prosaic blackboards and raised maps could not be thought of, and Cecil decided to wait to unpack them until she could consult her pupil as to their arrangement.

Azim Bey was absent with his father on an expedition to visit his married sister at Hillah, the ancient Babylon, and Cecil did not see him at all that day, so that she and Um Yusuf had tea together in solitary state. She spent the evening in writing home, describing her new abode fully for the benefit of her brothers and sisters, and went to bed early; for although candles were provided, no light was visible in any of the surrounding buildings, and silence reigned over the Palace. It seemed very lonely and unsafe, in a strange house, to sleep in a room with

open windows and doors that would not lock; and Um Yusuf dutifully placed her bed against her mistress's door, so as to be able to repel any attempted invasion, but none came.

The next day Cecil awoke early. It was a fine cool morning, and the sun was shining brightly, tempting her out of doors. As soon as she was dressed she went down into the garden, followed by Um Yusuf, to be greeted by a squeal of delight from her pupil, who rushed to meet her and presented her with a large and formal bouquet. He had evidently been tormenting the gardener with questions as to the why and wherefore of things, for Cecil fancied that she saw an expression of relief on that functionary's face as he withdrew discreetly and precipitately when he saw the veiled figures. Azim Bey walked solemnly beside his governess for a little way, pointing out the beauties of the garden, then, with a side-glance up at her face, he stole a little brown hand into hers and remarked—

"You are my mademoiselle, and I know I shall like you. I have had no one kind to talk to for a whole year, ever since my sister Naimeh Khanum was married to Said Bey and went to live at Hillah, except my father, and he is always busy. But you are going to stay here, and you will tell me everything I want to know. Denarien Bey has told me that you have many brothers, and you will tell me about them, won't you? When shall we begin lessons, mademoiselle?"

"As soon as you like," said Cecil, smiling, for it was refreshing to meet with a boy who looked forward to lessons with pleasure, and then she unfolded her difficulty with respect to the school furniture. To her amusement Azim Bey took her doubts as an insult.

"But yes, mademoiselle, of course I want all the books and maps in my reception-room. It is to be made to look like a schoolroom; I will have it exactly like a schoolroom in England. The things shall be unpacked and put there at once."

And he hurried her back to the house, summoned sundry servants, and set them to work to open and unpack the cases. Cecil expected that he would offer to help in the work, but he was far too fully conscious of his rank for that, and sat solemnly on the divan beside her, issuing his orders. Nor would he allow her to help either, for when she started up to show the servants by example the proper way of putting up a blackboard, he desired her peremptorily not to incommode herself, but to tell him what was wanted and he would direct the servants. At last, after the expenditure of much breath on the part of Azim Bey, and some fruitless impatience on that of Cecil, the work was done, and the walls of the great room decorated with maps and charts and tables. A large supply of books was neatly arranged on the dais until bookshelves could be procured, and in the lower part of the room were placed a regular school-desk and seat for the pupil, and a high desk and chair for the teacher, together with the blackboard, which Azim Bey regarded with loving eyes. He wanted to set to work at once, but Cecil, seeing old Ayesha looking at her distressfully, suggested mildly that they should breakfast first, since she had only had a cup of tea on rising. Her pupil assented graciously, and breakfast was brought in on trays which were placed on two little tables, one for Cecil and one for Azim Bey, while Um Yusuf, the nurse, and one or two other women-servants sat down in the lower part of the room to await their turn.

After breakfast lessons began, and Cecil found that her pupil knew nothing whatever of English, and must begin that, as well as most other subjects, from the beginning. He could read Arabic and Turkish, however, and his French astonished her. It was so fluent, so idiomatic, so exceedingly up-to-date, so freely sprinkled with Parisian slang, that she wondered where he could have picked it up.

"From M. Karalampi, who was once attached to the French Consulate," he told her,—“and elsewhere,” he added, with a meaning look which made her wonder.

The first morning was a type of all that followed. Azim Bey's day began with a visit to his father while he dressed, when he employed his time in asking the impossible questions dear to the heart of small boys all the world over, which the Pasha now generally parried by referring him to Mademoiselle Antaza. A walk in the garden, and breakfast with mademoiselle, followed this, and then came lessons. As a learner, Azim Bey was almost perfect. He was so quick that Cecil felt thankful that he knew so little to begin with, or she would have been afraid of his outstripping her. As it was, she foresaw a time when she would have to study hard to keep ahead of him, and this made her rejoice that she had arranged with Miss Arbuthnot to keep her supplied with the newest works on the principal subjects which she taught.

But the care of her pupil in lesson-time was the least of Cecil's duties. The lonely little fellow attached himself to his governess in the most marvellous way, and would scarcely allow her out of his sight. When she went to the Residency on Sundays he moped so persistently all day that the Pasha was almost tempted to

give permission for him to accompany her there, but refrained, partly for fear of his being made a Christian, but much more for fear of the outcry which would be raised on the subject by the Baghdadi zealots. Wherever the Bey went, Cecil must go. Even if he appeared at any State function in the Pasha's hall of audience, she must be present as a spectator in the latticed gallery which was appropriated to the ladies of the harem, so that she might be ready afterwards to answer his questions and appreciate his remarks, while he never went out without her except in his father's company. Her influence over him became generally recognised, until at last even the Um-ul-Pasha, who had taken no notice of her whatever since her unsuccessful call with Lady Haigh, began to consider her a power to be reckoned with. The amiable old lady had been so busy of late in carrying on a secret correspondence with her eldest grandson, the rebellious Hussein Bey, and in keeping him supplied with money, that she had paid slight attention to the little household, which was theoretically in the harem, yet not of it, and it struck her now with considerable force that she had allowed herself to commit a great mistake in tactics.

The first intimation Cecil received of a change of front on the part of the Um-ul-Pasha was a formal invitation to attend the great lady's reception with her pupil on the day of Bairam. Such an invitation was equivalent to a command, and it was furthermore imperative that Azim Bey should pay his respects to his grandmother at the feast, lest it should be inferred that she had utterly cast off both the Pasha and himself, and Cecil therefore prepared to go. Etiquette required that Um Yusuf, old Ayesha, and Basmeh Kalfa should go too, and they were all escorted by Mas'ud to the door of

the harem, where he delivered them into the charge of the principal aga.

It was now May, and the ladies were occupying the summer harem, a pleasant English-looking building, standing in a flower-garden, and furnished partly in European style. It was too early in the day as yet for any but family visitors, but the Pasha had already paid his respects to his mother and departed. The Um-ul-Pasha sat in the seat of honour, the corner of the divan, in the great reception-room, with the Pasha's two wives beside her. One of these ladies was an invalid, the other gentle and easy-going, and both were entirely under the dominion of their mother-in-law, an imperious little tyrant with a withered face and bright black eyes. It was easy to imagine what a flutter Azim Bey's impetuous, high-spirited Arab mother must have caused in the dove-cotes here, and with what feelings the other wives must have regarded their supplanter, and the Um-ul-Pasha the rebel against her authority. Nothing of this was allowed to appear now, however. Azim Bey kissed the hands of the ladies, who each made some carefully uncomplimentary remark, either on his appearance or dress—remarks which would have wounded Cecil's feelings if she had not known that they were made with the view of averting the evil eye. The three servants kissed the hems of the ladies' robes, and passed on to join the throng of their intimates in the lower part of the room, and Cecil, after a deep reverence to each of the exalted personages, was graciously requested to sit down. She was used to sitting on cushions on the floor by this time, and obeyed at once, while the Um-ul-Pasha prepared to talk to her through the medium of Mademoiselle Katrina, a plump Levantine lady in a red and green silk dress, who lived in the

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harem, and acted as secretary, interpreter, and messenger to the great lady. The customary compliments and a few unimportant remarks were first exchanged, and then the Um-ul-Pasha came to business.

"You are English, are you not?" she asked through Mdlla. Katrina.

Cecil answered in the affirmative.

"Is it true that it is the custom in your country for young people to settle about their marriage for themselves, without their parents arranging the matter?" was the next question, to which also Cecil returned an unsuspecting reply, all unprepared for what was to follow.

"Then why are you not married?" asked the Um-ul-Pasha, bending her black brows on her visitor, much as Um Yusuf had done in asking the same question. The query was certainly an embarrassing one, and Cecil answered blushing that in England it was customary for the gentleman to take the initiative in matters of the kind, and, well——. But it was unnecessary for her to say any more, the inference was obvious, and the expression on the Um-ul-Pasha's face, faithfully copied on the countenances of the other ladies, and respectfully reflected on that of Mdlla. Katrina, said, "And no wonder!" It was an uncomfortable moment, and to make the situation still more awkward, some mischievous sprite prompted Azim Bey to put in a remark on his own account.

"When I am grown up, I shall marry mademoiselle," he said, in his shrill little voice, and then sat and hugged himself in happy consciousness of the bombshell he had thrown into the group. Cecil would have felt a keen pleasure at the moment in shaking him, and his grandmother's fingers twitched as though she longed to have

him by the throat. Mdlla. Katrina seemed actually to grow pale and shrunken with horror, and the other two ladies subsided into limp heaps on their cushions, murmuring breathless exclamations of terror and dismay. It was the Um-ul-Pasha who recovered herself first, and she hailed the opportunity of administering a snub to her grandson and his governess at the same time.

"You speak foolishly, Bey," she said, in her haughtiest tones, "and I am surprised that Mdlla. Antaza has not taught you better. She knows very well that if I had not full confidence in her integrity, I should advise my son, your father, to send her back to her own country at once on account of that foolish speech of yours. As it is, such nonsense as this makes me doubtful of the wisdom of keeping her here."

Cecil flushed hotly, and would have risen and taken her departure, but her pupil answered without the slightest trace of confusion.

"But you always hated her coming, madame, and when my father refused to listen to you, you would not eat anything for a whole day. It is my father who has brought mademoiselle here, and he will not send her away."

"Bey, don't be rude to your grandmother," said Cecil, reprovingly, and the entrance of coffee and cakes here relieved the tension of the situation. The Um-ul-Pasha became markedly gracious once more, and insisted upon taking a sip from Cecil's cup, and breaking a piece from her cake, to show her good faith, but the only effect which this exaggerated affability produced upon those chiefly concerned was expressed by Azim Bey's remark to his governess as they departed—

"Mademoiselle, the Um-ul-Pasha is intending some-

thing. It is not poison this time; I wonder when we shall know what it is! Did you hear my grandmother say to Mdlle. Katrina as we came away, 'When the wife of the Balio Bey comes, see that she is admitted when no other visitors are present'? So you will hear all about it from the Mother of Teeth."

"You know that I have told you not to speak of Lady Haigh by that name, Bey," said Cecil, severely. "The wife of the Balio Bey should always be mentioned with respect."

Sir Dugald Haigh was the Balio Bey, the word being a corruption of *bailo*, the title of the Venetian Ambassador to the Porte in the middle ages, and the name spoke volumes to every inhabitant of Baghdad, so that Azim Bey submitted to the correction meekly. As he had prophesied, Cecil heard from Lady Haigh a full account of her interview with the Um-ul-Pasha when they next met, on the occasion of Queen Victoria's birthday, which fell close after Bairam that year, and on which all the English in the region kept holiday. Cecil spent the day at the Residency, as it had been carefully specified in her agreement with the Pasha that she should do, and she did not feel at all averse from a short return to civilised dress and English society. Lady Haigh told her the story in the evening, when they had a few minutes to spare before the arrival of the guests for the dinner-party which was *de rigueur* on the occasion.

"I have simply laughed over it ever since, my dear," said Lady Haigh; "but I must tell it you quickly, or these people will be coming. Put in plain language, the Um-ul-Pasha is willing to give you a handsome outfit and dowry if you marry at once, just as if you were one of her own favourite attendants."

"And was any particular gentleman indicated?" asked Cecil.

"Certainly; it is Ovannes Effendi, the Pasha's secretary. Nazleh Khanum put the case very plainly from her own point of view. She said that you had evidently failed to get married in your own country, or you would not have come out here, and that you were wretchedly thin, and had no idea of improving either your eyes or your complexion. As for Ovannes Effendi, she said that he was in a good position, and would make a kind husband. He was also a Christian—she laid great stress upon that point of suitability—and could be trusted to marry thankfully any lady the Um-ul-Pasha might be pleased to recommend to him."

"And what did you say?" asked Cecil, laughing.

"Well, my dear, I said that I was much obliged to Nazleh Khanum for her kind intentions, but that I intended to make your settlement in life my concern. I said that I had no doubt whatever of being able to find you a husband as soon as ever you wanted one. In fact, I repaid the Um-ul-Pasha with interest for the slight she put upon us when you first came. I had to put it in oriental style, you see, or she wouldn't have understood it, but it makes me laugh whenever I think of it. Imagine the luckless Ovannes Effendi suddenly saddled with a London B.A. for a wife! Oh, there are those people! Let us go into the drawing-room."

The dinner-party over, a number of other people came in who had been invited to a garden-*fête*, a style of entertainment to which the grounds of the Residency were peculiarly adapted. Carpets and cushions were strewn upon the terraces, the buildings were all illuminated, and to crown all, there were two bands of music, European and native, playing against each other, so as

to satisfy every taste. The evening was to close with a grand display of fireworks, and Cecil, looking for a spot whence she might obtain a good view, found Charlie Egerton by her side.

"There's a capital place here," he said, "and just room for two. I haven't spoken to you all day, and I've scarcely seen you all the evening."

"But you ought to be helping Sir Dugald to entertain the guests," said Cecil.

"But you are a guest," he retorted, quickly, "and the rest have the fireworks to entertain them. Besides, have you no compassion for the sorrows of a poor wretch who has been trying in vain to entertain two wholly unsympathetic ladies at the same time during the whole evening, and could only approach success by making Mrs Hagopidan laugh at Madame Denarien, and Madame Denarien feel shocked at Mrs Hagopidan?"

"What a very edifying conversation!" laughed Cecil. "But I saw you talking to Madame Petroffsky part of the time."

"Only for a moment, and the merest politenesses, I assure you. I can't bear emancipated women, they are all so dreadfully alike. Now don't take up the cudgels for them, please, Miss Anstruther. I have no doubt that Anna Ivanovna is an excellent person, but she is not my ideal. Besides, we quarrelled the last time we had an argument, and I hear that she speaks of me now as *ce lourdaud de médecin anglais*. Could a self-respecting man be expected to put up with that?"

"But the other two are not like her," said Cecil.

"No, indeed," said Charlie. "Her worst enemy could not call Madame Denarien an emancipated woman. By the way, what a comment it is on Den-

rien's modern culture and occidental tastes! He marries a girl brought up in a Syrian convent, whose teachers have been French nuns of medieval views. She can repeat a few Latin prayers, work embroidery, and make sweetmeats, and has pronounced ideas on the possibility of enhancing her beauty by dyeing her hair and using white and red paint liberally. But she is absolutely uneducated and can't talk a bit. She can sit and smile sweetly, and that is all. A doll could do as much."

"Yes, she is a very fair specimen of the beautiful uneducated Eastern woman whom you admired so much a short time ago," said Cecil, wickedly. "But what can you find to say against Myrta Hagopidan?"

"Do you call each other by your Christian names already?" asked Charlie, in pretended alarm. "I hope I have not said anything much against her, Miss Anstruther. I had no idea that you were on such affectionate terms with our bride."

"My favourite governess went from the South Central to be principal of the Poonah High School, where Myrta was educated," said Cecil, "and she lives so close to the Palace that I am often able to go in and see her. You have no idea how delightful it is to have some one with whom one can talk shop again. One's school-days are really the happiest time in one's life, you know, at least to look back upon. And then she is so pretty and bright."

"Yes," said Charlie, "she is smart, which emancipated women are not, as a rule. But she is out of her element here. She comes to Baghdad fresh from her school, brimful of modern notions, and thinks she can lead society here. It won't work. The English look askance at her as being 'a kind of native, don't you

know?' and the rest do not understand her. And really a woman whose happiness depends upon society and society papers can't find Baghdad congenial."

"But her happiness doesn't depend on them," said Cecil. "She has a great many interests, and she helps Mr Hagopidan with all his English correspondence."

"Then I have misjudged her," said Charlie. "See how much more clearly the feminine mind penetrates into character! I generalised hastily from the fact that Mrs Hagopidan plied me with second-hand Simla gossip and last season's Belgravian personalities, which I detest."

"Poor thing!" said Cecil; "she was only trying to suit your tastes. She never talks to me like that."

"And now," went on Charlie, meditatively, "she proves to be an excellent wife and a clever and businesslike woman."

"I never like judging people from casual impressions," said Cecil, "but sometimes it is very hard not to do it. That tall dark man, for instance, who is talking to Madame Petroffsky—I don't like him. I have seen him once or twice at the Palace, crossing the outer court with the Pasha, and he always seems to me to be—what shall I say?—slippery."

"I should say that you had described him exactly," said Charlie. "He is a peculiar product of centuries of contact between European and Eastern diplomacy, and he is particularly slippery. He is a Levantine Greek, and his name is Karalampi."

"Oh, I have heard Azim Bey talk of him," said Cecil. "He told me he taught him French."

"I think Azim Bey may be very thankful that he has got into other hands," said Charlie.

"Why?" asked Cecil.

"Well, one hears a good deal about Karalampi which one doesn't care to repeat, but I can tell you what he is. The Pasha employs him as a spy on the various consulates, and the consulates use him as a spy on the Pasha and on each other. How he contrives to play them all off against one another I don't know, but I suppose he gives each employer his turn. He used to be attached to the French Consulate, but no doubt his present position is more lucrative. He does people's dirty work for them. Of course he is not officially employed by any one, but if you could question Sir Dugald you would find out that more than once M. Karalampi had furnished important information in the nick of time and had been suitably rewarded."

"I don't believe it," said Cecil, indignantly. "Who told you?"

"Azevedo, the old Jewish banker, a great crony of mine. Most of my friends are Jews, Turks, infidels, or heretics, somehow."

"Well, one can never tell what people will pride themselves upon," said Cecil, looking away. "But such a choice of friends——"

"I never said I was proud of it," he said, quickly.

"No, your tone said it for you," said Cecil; "it implied that it was original and uncommon to have such a circle of acquaintances. But if you are so fond of Jews, why don't you get to know Dr Yehudi?"

"What, the fat old padre down in the town?"

"Yes; you seldom have him here on Sundays, because he knows so many more languages than Mr Schad, and so does more mission-work. He can speak an extraordinary number of modern dialects, and knows Syriac and Chaldee and all the old languages as well."

"Oh, I have heard them talking of him at Azevedo's."

To mention his name there is like waving a red rag before a particularly furious bull. And so he is one of those expensive people, converted Jews? You know it costs, they say, a thousand pounds to convert one Jew. I should like to see one. I'll go and look him up."

"I hope you will," said Cecil, quietly.

Charlie looked at her a moment to discover whether she was angry with his speech.

"Don't you mind my saying that about the thousand pounds?" he asked.

"Why should I?" said Cecil. "Can you say that a soul, whether Dr Yehudi's or any one else's, is not worth so much? But when you know him, you will be better able to judge for yourself."

CHAPTER IX.

LITERATURE AND POLITICS.

"I HAVE made the acquaintance of your old friend," Charlie said to Cecil a few Sundays after this conversation.

"Oh, you mean Dr Yehudi," said she. "How do you like him?"

"My Western mind admires him extremely, because he is so tremendously in earnest, but my Eastern mind is disgusted by his restlessness. Why can't he let people alone? He must always be attacking some one's cherished beliefs or pet foibles. If I was really an Eastern, I suppose I should regard him as a prophet, and become a disciple. But I really do believe there is something in it."

"Something in what?" asked Cecil.

"Well—in the conversion of Jews, in spite of the thousand pounds. Old Yehudi is such a splendid fellow—with his power and talents he might have done almost anything if he had remained a Jew, but he has given it all up, and the way the Jews here hate him for it! He has a fascination for them, though; they go and argue with him by the hour, and then leave the house tearing their clothes and calling down

curses upon him. But he's awfully good to them, and the Moslems respect him tremendously. He seems to do a great deal of good in one way and another, but I can't help thinking he would do better as a medical man. It must be a hopeless kind of work preaching to a set of poor wretches so horribly afflicted as some of them are."

"Why don't you offer to go and help him?" asked Cecil.

Charlie looked confused.

"How did you know?" he said. "Of course I can't give up my time to anything of the kind now, but I did say something to him one day about throwing up this place and working under him. What do you think he said to me? He looked me over very slowly, and said, 'My goot yong friend, you are what we call a rolling stone, never staying long in one place. In the Missions this is as bad as in the worldly affairs. Let me see you staying where you are for five years, working faithfully under the goot Balio Bey, and then come to me again.' That was rather rough on me, wasn't it? I wonder how he knew that Sir Dugald and I didn't exactly hit it?"

"He knows Sir Dugald, and he is beginning to know you," said Cecil; "and by his putting it in that way, he meant to show that it was not Sir Dugald's fault."

"I am doomed to be snubbed to-day," said Charlie, and went off laughing to visit his hospital. Cecil felt more light-hearted than usual about him that night. Generally his erratic ways and strange acquaintances weighed upon her mind a good deal, but she felt more at ease now that he had learnt to know the versatile and friendly Dr Yehudi. He would be better employed in discussing Talmudical theology or Syriac roots with

him, even if no higher themes were touched upon, than in gathering scandal about Sir Dugald and the foreign consuls generally from old Isaac Azevedo. Cecil had taken a rather hastily founded dislike to this old man, of whom she knew only by hearsay. It even made her doubtful of the correctness of her own estimate of M. Karalampi, to find it confirmed by reports from such a quarter. But a corroboration of Charlie's opinion of Azim Bey's former teacher was speedily to be provided from an independent source.

Cecil's relations with her pupil continued to be of the happiest character. In the seclusion of their own courtyard he was almost always with her. He was perfectly content to be silent if she was busy, and possessed the happy faculty of being able to do nothing and yet not get into mischief. But stories were what he delighted in, and all the pranks of Fitz, Terry, Patsy, and Loey were recounted over and over again, until he knew the boys as well as their sister did. It was a remarkable and gratifying thing about him that he never seemed inclined to imitate any of these tricks. He was too much grown up, indeed, to do anything of the kind, and it was from this very fact that Cecil's first great difficulty in dealing with him arose.

It so happened that she was not called upon to face this difficulty until one day in the height of summer, when she was feeling unusually weak and exhausted. She was only just recovering from an attack of fever, and the heat seemed stifling, even in the semi-darkness of the cellar schoolroom, with its carefully shaded windows close to the ceiling. She had succeeded in getting through the morning's lessons somehow, but she found it impossible to provide Azim Bey with his daily instalment of story. Upon this he volunteered to

tell her a story instead, while one of the negresses sat by and fanned her, and she prepared herself to listen with considerable interest. Whatever the story was, Azim Bey seemed to be quite excited about it, and she wondered whether he had inherited the Arab gift of improvisation. He sat thinking for a few minutes, and then, with very little preface, began to pour into her horrified ears such a tale as made her hair almost stand on end. At first she could only gaze at him in speechless horror as he spoke, accompanying his words with much vigorous descriptive action, but at last she found her voice, and burst forth with crimson face—

"Bey, be silent! How dare you repeat such things? Where did you learn that?"

"In a book, mademoiselle, a delightful book. Ah, magnificent!" he added, slowly, smacking his lips as if he enjoyed the recollection.

"Who gave it you?" gasped Cecil.

"M. Karalampi: he has given and lent me many, for two—three years. Ah, the dear pink and yellow books, how I love them!"

"And you have been reading these books ever since I came, and you never told me!" said Cecil, in deep reproach. Her pupil became penitent at once.

"Ah, mademoiselle," he cried, flinging himself down beside her, and seizing her hand, "he told me not to tell you. He said the English hated French books, and could not understand them, and he used to send them into my apartments at night. But at last I thought I would see whether you did understand. O mademoiselle, my dear mademoiselle, why are you weeping?"

"Because I am not fit to have the charge of you,"

said Cecil, sadly, dashing away the gathering tears. "I never thought of this. Oh, Bey, I trusted you!"

"Don't weep, mademoiselle, you are good; it is I that am wicked, vile, a beast! I will give them up—I will read no more. We will burn them all. I will never speak to M. Karalampi again. I promise, mademoiselle."

"How did you first learn to know M. Karalampi?" asked Cecil.

"My father wished me to take lessons in French, mademoiselle, and M. Karalampi offered to teach me, and then he said that I should learn best in reading by myself, and he would borrow some books for me from the French Consul."

"So he lent you these dreadful books?"

"Yes, mademoiselle. What do you think of him?"

"I am not going to say what I think. His behaviour is infamous."

"Ah, he is a wicked man then, mademoiselle?"

"Wicked is no word for it. Bey, you will keep your promise—you will burn these books?"

"I will, mademoiselle, I have given you my word; but it is like burning a piece of myself. What shall I do with nothing to read and all my pocket-money gone? for I have just sent to M. Karalampi what I owed him."

"You shall have English books," said Cecil, with sudden resolution. "You have no idea of the delightful books English boys read—books that will do you good instead of harm. We will read them together first, and when you know more English you shall read them by yourself. I can borrow one or two from the Residency until we can write home for more."

"Very well, mademoiselle. We will burn the bad books—we will not retain one. O women, bring wood into the courtyard, and fire."

The negresses obeyed in some surprise, which was only natural, considering the character of the weather; but Cecil and her pupil were both too much in earnest to care for the heat, and mounted the stairs at once to the courtyard, where the servants arranged a goodly pile. It was not in Azim Bey's nature to conduct such a ceremony as this without all the pomp possible, and having installed Cecil in an arm-chair in the verandah, he headed a small procession of slave-women to his own rooms and superintended their return with their arms full of pink and yellow volumes. Under his direction the leaves were torn out in handfuls and piled on the wood, and he himself heroically set fire to the pile. Cecil sat with a thankful heart watching the printed pages curl and blacken. She remembered now Um Yusuf's remark about Azim Bey's reading bad books, and the way Lady Haigh had laughed at it, but the possibility of such a constant inflow of corrupt literature as M. Karalampi had brought about had never occurred to her. On the principle of striking while the iron was hot, she proceeded next to cut off the supply. When Azim Bey had satisfied himself that not a scrap of the obnoxious books remained unburnt, he was summoned to write to M. Karalampi. Under Cecil's superintendence, but in his own phraseology, the boy expressed his thanks for M. Karalampi's kindness in the past, while remarking politely that he would not trouble him for any further specimens of French literature. When this letter had been despatched by a special messenger, Cecil breathed more freely, and wrote a little note to the Residency, asking

Lady Haigh to send her any boys' books she might happen to have.

Without Cecil's intending it in the slightest, her hasty scribble produced an extraordinary effect at the Residency. As has already been said, she had been suffering from fever, and had not, in consequence, been able to avail herself of her Sunday liberty for a fortnight. She had been attended by the Pasha's own physician, who had gone in person to the Residency to report to Lady Haigh on the condition of his patient, but Lady Haigh was not satisfied. She herself had hurt her foot and could not get to the Palace to see Cecil, and she was nervous and low-spirited about her, and feared that she was not properly taken care of. The hurried pencil note, with its uneven writing, seemed to her to confirm her fears, and she was hobbling to Sir Dugald's office to look for him and insist upon his doing something, when she remembered that he had gone to see the Pasha. Happily she came across Charlie instead, and he sympathised fully with her apprehensions.

"Yes, Cousin Elma, it does look bad. It seems to me very much as if they were keeping her shut up and she couldn't write without exciting suspicion. She gets hold of a scrap of paper and scribbles as plain a message as she dares without actually asking for help. You see from the writing that she must have been agitated and excited. I certainly think that this note ought to be answered in person."

"And my wretched foot!" groaned poor Lady Haigh.

"Oh, I'll go for you, Cousin Elma," said Charlie, hastily. "It might not do to wait until Sir Dugald comes back. I don't feel at all sure about that illness of Miss Anstruther's. It may be all a fraud on the part of the *hakim bashi* (doctor). At any rate, if you

will write a note saying that I am the surgeon of the Residency come to see Mademoiselle Antaza professionally, they must let me in. Of course, if you have the books, I may as well take them with me, in case it's all right."

About an hour afterwards, in consequence of this colloquy, Cecil and her pupil, who had begun their evening lessons, were disturbed by hearing Masûd's warning cry of "*Dastûr! Dastûr!*" Much surprised that the Pasha should pay his son a visit at this unwonted hour, Cecil and the other women hurriedly assumed their veils, presenting thereby an extremely grotesque aspect to Charlie as he approached, preceded by the much-perturbed Masûd. He could not help laughing to see the women instantaneously transforming themselves into closely swathed bundles at his appearance, and Azim Bey marked his levity with displeasure.

"This gentleman is an acquaintance of yours, mademoiselle?" he inquired frigidly, noticing that Cecil started.

"How do you do, Dr Egerton?" she asked, in some confusion. "May I present to you Dr Egerton from the English Consulate, Bey?"

Charlie composed his features and bowed with due solemnity, and then delivered his burden of books with a polite message from Lady Haigh. Having done this, he seemed to intend his visit to be considered as a friendly call, for he made several vain attempts to thaw the cool reserve of Azim Bey, who sat regarding him with disapproving eyes. Cecil was on thorns, fearing that her pupil would proceed to say something rude, and it was scarcely a matter of surprise to her when he remarked in his clearest tones—

"At this period of the day, monsieur, mademoiselle

and I are engaged with our studies. As I am certain that mademoiselle has no desire that these should be interrupted by the visits of her acquaintances, I may remark that if Milady Haigh has any message to send after this, it will be unnecessary for M. le docteur to put himself to the pain of bringing it."

Cecil turned crimson, and even Charlie looked confused for a moment. But his presence of mind did not forsake him, and he bowed politely, regretted that he had trespassed on the patience of mademoiselle and of the Bey, and took his departure.

"I do believe that little beggar's inclined to be jealous," he said to himself as he left the Palace and went back to the Residency, satisfied about Cecil, and thinking no more about Azim Bey and his ways.

Cecil dared not say anything to her pupil about his rudeness, fearing lest he should think she had some personal feeling in the matter. After all, she was not sorry that Dr Egerton should have received his *congé* so decisively, for it would never have done if he had taken it into his head to call again, and she was only thankful that the incident of the books should have ended so happily.

But she was reckoning without her host, for the incident was not yet terminated. Two or three days after the destruction of the French novels, Azim Bey came in from a ride with his father in a state of high self-satisfaction.

"It is not good to speak kindly to a wicked man—to treat him with distinction—is it, mademoiselle?"

"To treat him with distinction? Certainly not," said Cecil.

"Well, mademoiselle, I have treated the wicked man

rightly ; for M. Karalampi is a wicked man, is he not ? You said so yourself."

"I know I did ; but I didn't mean you to be rude to him, Bey," answered Cecil, in some alarm. "What have you done ?"

"We passed him to-day, mademoiselle, walking with the French Consul, and I refused to take the slightest notice of either of them ; for the Consul must also be wicked, since he lent M. Karalampi the books at first. Well, presently, when we halted, M. Karalampi approached me with an air of familiarity, and inquired with sorrow how he had offended me. I told him that I did not desire any further association with him, and that I no longer considered him as one of my intimates."

The boy was so well pleased with himself for this that none of Cecil's lectures on rudeness could produce any effect on him, and she dropped the subject in despair. But the French Consul and M. Karalampi did not see the matter in the same light, and they did their best, happily with only partial success, to found a diplomatic complication upon the incident. A note to the French Government complained of the pernicious influence exercised by England in the household of Ahmed Khémi Pasha, and in ornate and highly complimentary language deprecated the interference of ladies in politics. Cecil was gallantly described as a young woman profoundly learned, with manners the most distinguished, a countenance charming and altogether spiritual, and a bearing at once modest and intrepid, *Anglaise des Anglaises*. The sting of this description was intended to be in its tail, and the writer went on to say that this young girl, so innocent, so un-

suspicious, was only the tool of unscrupulous persons behind the scenes. Here followed a highly coloured portrait of Sir Dugald Haigh, who was described as "this inscrutable automaton of a man," "this impassive murderer of poor Hindus" (it is scarcely necessary to remark that the latter was a purely fancy touch, probably borrowed from the colonial methods of the writer's own nation), as a crafty schemer and a Machiavellian plotter.

The note produced a good deal of effect, and there was a debate upon the subject in the French Chamber, while at Westminster certain M.P.'s, whose tender consciences were wounded by the thought of England's exercising influence anywhere, questioned the Government upon it, and Cecil received through Sir Dugald a vague and formal caution which might have meant anything or nothing, and the matter dropped.

The English books which Cecil procured to replace the vanished novels proved extremely successful in accomplishing her object. Azim Bey devoured them eagerly, and held long conversations upon them with his governess afterwards. To her great amusement, the characters he discussed with most appreciation were those of the villain and of the capable person who acted as *deus ex machina*, and cleared up everything at the end of the story. He pursued the history of the villain's machinations with breathless interest, and generally carped at his ignominious downfall when virtue triumphed, declaring that such a man would never have let himself be conquered by such feeble means. On the other hand, the character of the wealthy old gentleman who adopts deserving orphan boys and starts them in life, takes necessitous heroes

into partnership, and bestows timely fortunes on penniless heroines, suited the vein of rather eccentric benevolence which was noticeable in him. Further reading brought him to wish to do something for the poor—and this not only in the way of giving alms to beggars in the street, which he did carefully as a religious duty. He wished to go amongst them and help them to raise themselves; and when his father absolutely refused to allow him to do anything of the kind, he demanded that his governess should find him some substitute for this employment. After some cogitation, Cecil suggested that he should take an interest in Dr Yehudi's Mission-schools, the best managed institution of their kind in Baghdad; and Azim Bey set to work at once, and gave the Pasha no peace until he had granted him leave to visit them.

It would be difficult to say whether the Bey or his entertainers felt the honour of this visit more acutely, but the programme was gone through in a thoroughly successful way. Azim Bey inspected all the buildings, listened to the children's lessons, asked them a few questions himself, and finally sent out one of his servants to buy sweetmeats to distribute among them—all with a stately and paternal air modelled on that which the Pasha wore on similar occasions. He was so supremely well satisfied with himself that, when the ceremony was over, he accepted the Yehudis' invitation to afternoon tea, and handled his cup and saucer as though to the manner born, or as if he had rehearsed the scene carefully beforehand, as he generally did when he was to meet Europeans. They were a very pleasant little party in the cellar of the Mission-house,—Mrs Yehudi pouring out her woes to Cecil in a corner on the subject of her husband's irrepressible activity, and

her conviction that he would kill himself with work; while Dr Yehudi, genial, rotund, and erudite, conversed with Azim Bey in the purest Arabic, when the harmony of the occasion was marred by the entrance of a visitor. Unfortunately, it was not one of the Jewish rabbis who were wont to come and argue with Dr Yehudi, nor even one of the Turkish gentlemen who sometimes honoured him with a visit for the sake of his many talents, but Charlie Egerton. As he advanced cautiously towards his hostess in the dim light, Azim Bey's brow grew black, and Cecil turned first red and then white, as she realised that her pupil's suspicious mind had instantly concluded that the meeting here was prearranged. Ever since Charlie's visit to their courtyard, Azim Bey had maintained a violent dislike of him, and refused to hear his name mentioned, alleging that he had forced his way into the Palace with the express design of insulting him and of thrusting himself upon Mdle. Antaza.

A prejudice of this kind could not be dealt with by argument, and Cecil had refrained from attempting it, but now she wished that she had not done so, for even the Yehudis perceived at once that something was wrong. The only unconcerned person was the intruder himself, who complimented Mrs Yehudi on her tea, chaffed the Bey on the subject of his gloomy countenance, and otherwise did his best to make things comfortable. But his efforts were in vain. No sooner had Cecil set down her tea-cup than her pupil rose.

"I am sorry to hasten you, mademoiselle, but it is time that we return. M. le pasteur, may I entreat you to command my servants to be summoned? Accept, madame, the assurance of my most distinguished consideration, and of my eternal gratitude for your hos-

pitality. Allow me to enjoy the hope of one day partaking of it again."

"May I ride with you as far as the Palace?" said Charlie to Cecil in a low voice, but Azim Bey heard him.

"No, monsieur, pray do not trouble yourself to move. Your attendance is not required. You understand me?"

"Perfectly, Bey," responded Charlie, and Azim Bey and his attendants mounted and rode off, the Bey keeping a sharp eye upon Cecil, with the view of preventing any lingering farewells. When they were well on their way, he demanded—

"Is this Dr Egerton always at the Mission-house when you go there, mademoiselle?"

"Certainly not," said Cecil.

"That means every time but once, I suppose?" he asked, rudely.

"You forget yourself, Bey," said Cecil, in grave reproof. "I am not accountable for Dr Egerton's movements, but I can tell you that I have never met him at the Mission-house before, and that I had no idea whatever that he would be there to-day."

Azim Bey grunted and changed the subject, absolutely refusing to refer to it again. He refused also to attend the prize-giving at the school, to which he had been looking forward, and gave Cecil as few chances as possible of going to the Mission-house. Nor did his precautions end here. Dr Yehudi received a confidential hint from Denarien Bey, warning him not to entertain persons from the British Consulate so frequently at his house, as the fact of the constant presence there of such individuals was

creating a suspicion in high quarters that the work was being carried on for political ends. The old missionary had no alternative but to lay the case before Charlie, who perceived that he was out-manceuvred, and was obliged to accept the situation. Lady Haigh laughed at him, but he felt himself an innocent and much injured individual.

CHAPTER X.

A CUP OF COFFEE.

FOR more than a year Azim Bey continued to be sulky on the subject of the Mission-school, although in everything else he was a pattern pupil. His intended career as a public benefactor seemed destined to end abruptly with Charlie Egerton's appearance in the Yehudis' parlour, and Cecil could not be wholly sorry for this, since political feeling in the city was not in a state to make house-to-house visitation either safe or pleasant. Matters were going rather badly in the pashalik just now. Two or three scanty harvests had been followed by famine, and the general distress was increased by the fact that the Pasha, who was much in want of money, had chosen this singularly inopportune moment for imposing a duty on the importation of foreign corn, a course which was strongly resented. Bands of marauders infested the country districts, and the constant expeditions necessary to keep the main trade-routes open involved an expenditure of men and money which could with difficulty be met. Hussein Bey, the Pasha's disaffected eldest son, who had been "lying low" for some time, had reappeared as the leader of one of these bands, and was doing his best to stir the populace to

revolt. His wrongs, in being set aside for his younger brother, who was being brought up as half a Christian, were in every one's mouth, and many people did not scruple to attribute the misfortunes of the province to the malign influence of the Englishwoman who was scarcely ever absent from Azim Bey's side. The position she enjoyed in the Palace was constantly attributed to witchcraft; and there were even those who said that things would never be right in Baghdad until Azim Bey and his governess were—well, disposed of. By degrees matters went from bad to worse. Riotous mobs beset unpopular officials in the streets, and more than one house was attacked and rifled. The Pasha shut himself up in the Palace, with a strong guard on duty night and day, and none of the household ventured out without an escort. When Cecil went to the Residency she was attended by a small army of soldiers and cavasses, and even these could scarcely keep back the howling mobs. Still no actual danger touched her personally, and she was inclined to adopt Sir Dugald's consolatory opinion that the bark of the Baghdadis was always worse than their bite, and that the latter might be considered, in mathematical language, as a negligible quantity, when something came to pass one day which showed her in what a perilous position she and her charge really stood at this time.

After lessons on this particular morning, Azim Bey despatched one of the slave-women to bring some coffee. The negress was longer than usual on her errand, and he waxed impatient, but she reappeared at last, hurrying in with three tiny jewelled cups on a silver tray. One cup was for herself, for it was her duty to taste the beverages supplied to the Bey, the remaining two for him and for Cecil. As the woman set the tray down

on the little octagonal table, Azim Bey gave it a slight twist so as to bring the cup which had been nearest to her hand opposite to himself. Her hand was already outstretched to take it, and she paused in surprise and hesitated.

"Taste the coffee, O Salimeh," said the boy, authoritatively.

Rather doubtfully, Salimeh stretched her hand across the tray, took the cup which was in front of her young master, and drank off the contents.

"Now drink another," said Azim Bey.

"O, my lord, they are for thee and for mademoiselle," remonstrated the woman, with a note of anxiety in her voice which attracted Cecil's attention. "How shall I drink my lord's coffee?"

"Drink it," said Azim Bey, shortly, fixing his eyes upon her.

As though fascinated by his gaze, she slowly stretched out her hand and took up another cup, raised it halfway to her lips, and paused.

"Drink it," he repeated, gazing at her, while her dark face grew pale and ghastly-looking with terror, until in a sudden frenzy she dashed the cup to the ground.

"O, my lord, pardon thy servant," she sobbed, flinging herself on her knees and grovelling before him. "God has made my lord very wise. There is death in the cup."

"Drink the other," said Azim Bey, unmoved.

His voice had been so calm throughout that it was only now that Cecil realised that she had barely escaped taking a prominent part in a tremendous tragedy. She interposed hastily.

"Bey, you cannot mean to make her drink it if it is poisoned? It will kill her."

"She would have killed you and me, mademoiselle. Get up and drink it, thou granddaughter of a dog!" he added to the wretched woman, who was weeping and howling at his feet.

"But it is not for you to punish her," remonstrated Cecil. "She may have been terrified into doing it. It ought to be inquired into."

"It shall be," said Azim Bey, grimly, and he summoned Masûd from the door. With the poisoned cup held to her lips, Salimeh confessed that she had been bribed to leave the tray of coffee on the ledge of a window which looked into the harem enclosure, and to turn her back for a moment. She had held in her hand the cup she intended for herself, so as to make things safe, but she could only guess what had been done to the other two. It took longer to find out who had been the other party to the dreadful transaction, but after a lengthy cross-examination she confessed that it was Zubeydeh Kalfa, the Um-ul-Pasha's head-slave. When this conclusion was reached, Azim Bey turned a meaning glance on Cecil.

"This case must go before my father, mademoiselle," he said; "it is too much for me to deal with. No doubt he would much prefer that I should settle it for myself and not involve him in trouble with my grandmother, but it is too serious. An example must be made. Take the woman away, O Masûd, and keep her safely until the Pasha can give thee orders about her."

"Upon my head be it, O my lord," responded Masûd, with a grin, and dragged away the miserable Salimeh, shrieking and praying for mercy.

"Did you know beforehand that the coffee was poisoned, Bey?" was the first question Cecil asked her pupil when they were alone.

"We in Turkey learn to expect such incidents in times like these, mademoiselle," said the boy, with lofty, almost *blasé*, condescension, "and I have long been looking out for some token of the kind from my grandmother or my brother, but I knew no more about this attempt before it was made than you did."

"Then how did you discover it?" asked Cecil, with natural curiosity.

"Perhaps, mademoiselle, you may not have observed that I am of a somewhat suspicious nature? Any unnecessary action or unusual occurrence sets me to reflect upon the reason for its happening. Apply this to our experience to-day. I send the villanous Salimeh for coffee. She is much longer than she need be in bringing it, and returns to the room hastily, and with an air of disturbance. My suspicions are aroused, but I say nothing, knowing that no one looks so foolish as the person who imagines perpetually that plots are being directed against him. I merely turn the tray partly round, secure that the would-be murderess will not murder herself. Her very first movement confirms my suspicions, and if any further assurance is wanted, it is supplied by her later behaviour. There you have the whole thing."

"It is very dreadful," said Cecil, with a shudder; "but you will ask his Excellency to deal gently with her, Bey?"

"Gently, mademoiselle?" and a smile broke over Azim Bey's solemn countenance. "Is she to have liberty to murder us successfully another time? Besides, an example is necessary, and she is the only culprit that can be reached. Zubeydeh Kalfa may possibly be seized, but to defend herself she would

implicate her employers, and then the matter could not be hushed up."

"But this is not justice, Bey," remonstrated Cecil.

"No, mademoiselle, it is policy," said Azim Bey, unabashed.

And the dictates of policy were followed in the investigation which succeeded. No one who heard of the matter doubted for an instant that the Um-ul-Pasha had planned the murder of her younger grandson in the interests of Hussein Bey, but all Ahmed Khémi Pasha's efforts were directed to prevent the slightest whisper being breathed against his mother. He guarded with the utmost loyalty the good name which she had perilled so rashly, and succeeded in preventing any open declaration of the truth. Zubeydeh Kalfa was got rid of by being married to a former pipe-bearer of the Pasha's, who was going to live in Mosul, a town which has a Pasha of its own, and where gossip concerning the Palace harem at Baghdad would therefore be at a discount. Salimeh disappeared. Cecil was left in doubt as to her fate, and could never discover what had become of her. All that Azim Bey would say when questioned was that she had gone to a far country, but whether she had been put to death, or disposed of in the same way that Zubeydeh Kalfa had been, Cecil never knew. Masûd and the women-servants who had seen and heard what had happened received handsome presents to induce them to keep the matter quiet, and Cecil was astonished by the gift of a gold watch of abnormal size, with a richly jewelled case and a massive chain. Its value was considerable, and she exhibited it at the Residency with surprise and delight, until Lady Haigh told her that it was intended as a bribe to make her hold her tongue. She was horrified at this, and

wished to return it to the Pasha at once, but Lady Haigh objected.

"You don't intend to publish abroad your belief that the Um-ul-Pasha tried to poison you and Azim Bey, I suppose?" she said; "so why not keep the watch, if you are going to earn it?"

"But the Pasha will think that I am silent on account of his having given it to me," said Cecil.

"Of course he will, my dear; and if you give it back, he will take it as a sign that it is not valuable enough, and he will go on piling up his bribes, but he will never understand your scruples. Orientals don't indulge in such luxuries, and why should you not let the poor man have the happy feeling that your silence is secured, since it is so after all?"

Cecil was silenced, but not convinced, and put the watch by, for her pleasure in it was spoilt. Presently she had to encounter another argument from Charlie Egerton, to whom the news of the attempted murder had filtered through the gossip of the servants and the streets. He was horrified to learn the danger she had been in, and urgently desirous that she should at once quit the Palace and take refuge at the Residency. To his great concern, Cecil refused to do anything of the kind. It was true that she had felt nervous and unstrung for a few days after the shock of the sudden danger and escape, but since then she had pulled herself together and looked the situation boldly in the face. She was ashamed of the hasty impulse which had seized her to seek refuge in flight, and determined to remain at the post of duty. Hence, when Charlie attacked her, he found her armed at all points.

"It isn't right," he said, vehemently. "You are in

constant danger. They may catch you off your guard at any moment, and there you are, alone in that great place, with traitors all round you."

"I am not afraid," said Cecil. "Don't you know that 'each man's immortal till his work is done'? My work certainly lies at the Palace, and while I can, I hope to do it."

"That would be a poor consolation if you and your work both ended together," said Charlie, bitterly, too much in earnest to pick his phrases.

"Why?" said Cecil. "We know that I shan't die so long as there is any work at all left for me to do, so that if I am killed it must mean that my work is done."

"I can't see it as you do," said Charlie, conscious that this was not what he meant at all; "and I have no wish to try, either. You are wrought up and overstrained just now. I see that you are taking your life in your hand, and going into fearful danger quite needlessly."

"But it's not needlessly," said Cecil; "it's my duty. Why, suppose that cholera, or the plague, broke out here, would you shut yourself up and refuse to go among the people? I know you wouldn't. You would work night and day, and never think of the danger."

"That's different," said Charlie. "It would be my business to do it. A fellow would be a cad not to. But I wouldn't let you do it, as you know. It's a very different thing going into danger oneself, and seeing you go."

"But you will have to submit to it, Charlie," said Lady Haigh's voice. "Cecil, my dear, I want you." And Charlie's chance of breaking down Cecil's resolution was gone.

In his desperation, when Cecil was about to return to the Palace, he applied to Sir Dugald, and was politely snubbed for his pains. Certainly, Sir Dugald admitted, he was bound to afford protection to all British subjects, but he could not force any of them to avail themselves of it, and he pointed out the painful absurdity of the situation which would be caused by any attempt to detain Cecil at the Residency against her will. Such an argument had little effect upon Charlie, but Sir Dugald's ruling characteristic was the fear of being made to look absurd, and he really felt that this consideration settled the matter. Charlie poured out his woes, as usual, to Lady Haigh, who attempted to console him by the reflection that the Um-ul-Pasha was not likely to make another effort at poisoning just yet, since her intended victims would be on their guard, to which he replied that she would probably be counting on this very confidence as to her intentions, and thus be emboldened to renew her attack.

In the little courtyard which formed Cecil's world during six days out of every seven, public opinion agreed with Lady Haigh rather than with Charlie. It was the general feeling that although no public reference had been made to the Um-ul-Pasha's share in the conspiracy, yet the danger of detection had approached sufficiently near to give her a very good fright, and that she would make no further attempt on her grandson's life for the present. The Pasha's prevailing fear was lest more violent means might now be employed, and some band of brigands subsidised to effect the desired object. His Excellency was between two fires. On one side were the Hajar Arabs, the tribesmen of Azim Bey's dead mother, who had espoused the boy's

cause with characteristic and troublesome ardour, and threatened to murder the Pasha if he allowed any harm to come to him; and on the other the rest of the powerful Arab tribes of the neighbourhood, who had no special interest in Hussein Bey, but adopted his cause on account of its not being that of the Hajar. With these were the majority of the Baghdadis, some because of a natural instinct for opposing the powers that be, others because they sincerely attributed to Azim Bey and the Englishwoman the misfortunes of the time.

On account of this danger from brigands and from the disaffected Arabs, the Pasha forbade his son ever to go beyond the city walls, except in company with himself and his large escort. This prohibition fell hardly upon Azim Bey, who found his daily rides much curtailed and his weekly hunting-parties almost entirely stopped; but Cecil held sole command in their own courtyard, and would not permit any evasion of his Excellency's orders. Her pupil felt it very dull, and at last, when he grew thoroughly tired of rambles confined to the garden, began to ask again about the Yehudis and their work. Hearing that the yearly prize-giving at the schools was again approaching, he became much interested; and when Cecil hinted that he might possibly be invited to preside at the ceremony, his excitement rose to fever heat. An announcement that the children had been taught to sing an Arabic version of "God save the Queen," so arranged as to refer to the Sultan instead of to her most gracious Majesty, and an elaborate letter in Turkish from Dr Yehudi, adorned with many flourishes, both literary and caligraphical, and requesting the honour of his presence, decided him to go, were it only with the view of encouraging loyalty in the rising generation.

Even in this exalted state of mind, however, he exacted a solemn promise from both Cecil and Dr Yehudi that Dr Egerton should not be invited. This once settled, he bent himself to the task of obtaining his father's permission to go—a formality which the deluded Cecil had imagined to have been complied with long before.

After all, the Pasha was not very difficult to coax into consent, for he was specially anxious to stand well with England just then, and he had a vague idea that there were a good many people there who took an utterly incomprehensible interest in such an unimportant and far-off object as the Jewish Mission-school at Baghdad. But although he was willing that England should know of his tolerant behaviour, he was particularly anxious that the news of it should not spread in Baghdad, lest the mob should seek revenge at once against the Christians and against Azim Bey by burning down the Mission-house, in which case his Excellency would have to make good the damage. For this reason, Azim Bey was informed, to his great chagrin, that he must go quite privately to the prize-giving, without any pomp and circumstance whatever, for fear of exciting the populace. Not a word was to be breathed of the matter to any one but the parties immediately concerned; there was to be no military escort, no long train of servants, only the two nurses and the donkey-boys to attend upon Cecil and himself, and Masûd to give an air of respectability to the outing. All were to wear their plainest clothes, even the donkeys were not to be decked with their State trappings, and the route was strictly to be limited to unfrequented streets. Was there ever such a poor and mean caricature of the gorgeous pageant Azim Bey had

proposed to himself? Still, it was a great thing to get out of the Palace for a day, and the anticipated delights of playing Lord Paramount at the prize-giving consoled the boy under his disappointment.

The ride from the Palace to the Mission-house was undertaken in the quietest part of the day, when there were few people in the streets, and it passed without any hostile manifestation or even any recognition of the riders. This fact delighted Cecil, but her pupil seemed to be a little piqued. He had been looking forward to an exciting and perilous transit, and this was rather tame in comparison; but his grievance was forgotten when the Mission-house courtyard was safely reached, and he found that the buildings were decorated with flags, and that all the school-children were drawn up in line to receive him. When once he had dismounted, he drew himself up with an exact imitation of his father's rather pompous stride on State occasions, greeted Dr and Mrs Yehudi and Mr and Mrs Schad with great urbanity, and passed on to the house with them between the lines of children, bowing graciously right and left in his progress, as Cecil had told him was the custom of royalty in England. At the examination which followed he sat gravely in his chair and made sage remarks on what he heard, while the musical drill delighted him excessively. He distributed the prizes without the least shyness or awkwardness, and consoled the less fortunate children with sweets, a form of comfort which appealed very strongly to himself. He was an interested spectator of the games which followed, and of the feast to which the children at length sat down, and only consented to tear himself away at Cecil's repeated entreaties, assuring his hosts that he had enjoyed

himself extremely, and would have liked to remain until night.

Cecil was not so happy, for during the latter part of the time she had been on thorns lest anything should happen to prevent their getting safely back through the city. With all her haste it was the cool of the day when they emerged from the gate of the Mission-house, a time at which the streets were at their fullest. She dared not order her cavalcade to quicken their pace, for fear of attracting attention, but her precaution was in vain, for her pupil was recognised as they passed through a crowd collected at the street corner, and they were soon followed by a number of ill-conditioned men and boys making uncomplimentary remarks in Arabic. Azim Bey waxed exceedingly wroth at this, and wanted to order Masûd and the donkey-boys to charge the crowd, but Cecil succeeded in restraining him. She could not, however, keep him from exchanging defiance with his ragged escort, a proceeding which improved the temper of neither.

"I will have your heads cut off! You shall be impaled upon the walls!" shrieked the little fellow at last, and the crowd replied by derisive laughter and ominous threats directed against himself and the foreign woman, heaping special abuse on Cecil.

"These people not good, mademoiselle," said Um Yusuf, coming to her mistress's bridle-rein. "Some one from the harem gone tell them who we are, and they kill us. We should get away from them. See, there is a house with door open. Perhaps we find shelter there."

Cecil repeated what Um Yusuf had said to her

pupil, and Azim Bey, somewhat frightened now, consented to adopt the plan proposed. The donkeys' heads were quickly turned in the direction of the house, and before the astonished owners realised what was happening, the party were all inside the courtyard and the door shut and fastened.

CHAPTER XI.

A DIPLOMATIC INCIDENT.

WHEN the people of the house discovered the identity of their uninvited guests, the welcome which they offered them was the reverse of warm. All Azim Bey's threats and promises could not induce them to allow him and his attendants to remain in the shelter of the courtyard until a messenger could be despatched to the Palace and return with a military escort; indeed they could scarcely be restrained from thrusting them out again to the mob, who were clamouring at the gate. It was some time before largely increased offers could win them over to consent to a compromise, namely, to let the whole party out by a back door leading into an unfrequented street, from which, through many twists and turnings, the Palace might be reached.

"But we cannot all go together," said Azim Bey, "or they will recognise us again. We must separate."

"Never!" cried Cecil, resolutely.

"Oh, you and I will keep together, mademoiselle. What I mean is, that we must not leave the house again as a large party. The two nurses will mount our donkeys and go with the servants. You and I will depart by ourselves."

"Not unless you are disguised," said Cecil. "For you to go in that dress would simply be to let yourself be murdered."

"The disguise will not be difficult," he cried, tearing off his long black coat and unbuckling his little sword. "Now if the good people of this house will give us in exchange for these an old *abba* and *kaffiyeh*, I shall be unrecognisable. As for you, mademoiselle, no one could know you. You look just like any Baghdadi lady in a sheet and yellow slippers."

The owners of the house could not resist the advantageous offer made them, and Cecil, seeing in the bold stroke proposed their only chance, allowed it to be accepted. A ragged old cloak, with the orthodox brown and white stripes, and a torn head-handkerchief, fastened round the brow by a rope of twisted wool, which kept it well down over the face, made Azim Bey a most realistic-looking little Arab, and Cecil felt that it was very unlikely that he would be recognised in his disguise. The mob in front of the house had become quieter by this time, and old Ayesha, the Bey's nurse, proposed that she and her fellow-servants should leave the house by the front door a few minutes after he and Cecil had stolen out at the back, thus leading the crowd to believe that the two most important members of the party were still within. Cecil objected to this as sending the servants into unnecessary danger, but Um Yusuf assured her that without herself and the Bey they would in all probability be able to pass through the streets in safety, and she allowed herself to be overruled.

"Go with the women, O Masûd," said Azim Bey to the faithful negro, who was following them to the back door.

"God forbid, O my lord!" said Masûd, stolidly. "Am I not here to attend upon my lord and mademoiselle, and shall I leave them?"

"Go thy way, O Masûd!" cried Azim Bey, impatiently. "Thou art as well known in Baghdad as the tower of the Lady Zubeydeh (upon whom be peace) itself, and shall we be slain for the sake of thy black face?"

"My lord is very wise, and his servant will obey him," returned Masûd, and marched back to the other servants.

The door was cautiously opened, and Cecil, clasping the hand of her little pupil, and holding her sheet in the proper way so as to hide all but her eyes, quickly found herself in a narrow lane behind the house. The way had been explained to them, and they started off briskly, scarcely speaking. Azim Bey found this adventure exciting enough to satisfy even his bold aspirations, and Cecil was afraid to begin a conversation, lest her foreign accents should attract the notice of any one in the houses on either side. Presently the lane led them into a quiet street, where little knots of people were standing talking and others were going about their business in a leisurely kind of way, and mingling with these they passed on unnoticed. Next they had to go through one of the bazaars, where business was pretty well over for the day, and where groups of disappointed buyers and unsuccessful salesmen were discussing the crops and abusing the Pasha. Still they were unrecognised, but when they had nearly passed through the bazaar they came upon a blind beggar, who was sitting on the ground, with his hand held out, asking for alms. Before Cecil could stop him, Azim Bey took a coin from his pocket and threw it to him.

It was a gold piece, and the mendicant called down blessings on his head as he picked it up. But others had noticed it also, and a crowd of beggars seemed to start up from the very ground as they thronged from their various stations and niches, exhibiting their sores and deformities, and demanding charity rather than entreating it.

"*Voici une foule de gens qui vont nous suivre de nouveau, mademoiselle,*" said Azim Bey, as the shopkeepers and their gossips, attracted by the hubbub, joined the crowd and tried to get a glimpse of these generous strangers. At the sound of the unfamiliar tongue they started and looked curiously at the pair, and a quick buzz went round among them. Cecil grasped her pupil's hand and dragged him on, once more feeling ready to shake him for his foolishness, but it was evident that the men around had understood who they were, for they closed up as if to hustle them. Intent only on escaping, Cecil led her charge down the first turning they reached, and they hurried on breathlessly, through narrow echoing alleys, with houses almost meeting overhead, while behind them came the sound of many feet. The lanes afforded great facilities for eluding a foe, and Cecil and Azim Bey turned and doubled until they were tired. At last they came out on an open space with a well in it, and found their enemies awaiting them—a motley crowd of rough-looking men, with a sprinkling of impish boys and witch-like old women. A yell arose from the crowd as soon as the fugitives were seen, and Cecil turned and fled once more, dragging the boy with her. For a few moments they ran back along the way they had come (no easy task, as any one who has tried to run in loose slippers along a back alley of Baghdad, unpaved and

uneven, will confess), then found themselves at a place where two ways met, hesitated, chose one at random, and came face to face with a detachment of their pursuers. They were doubly pursued now, as they turned back and took the other path, and stones and pieces of rubbish began to hurtle through the air. Suddenly Cecil reeled against the wall and loosed her hold of her pupil's hand.

"Go on, Bey," she gasped, "I am spent. I can't go any farther, but you may get away. Run on a little—creep into some house and hide. Oh, go, go!" as the yells of the enemy approached.

"I shall not go," returned the boy, stoutly, pulling out a jewelled dagger about three inches long. "I am going to fight for you, mademoiselle, and if they kill you they shall kill me too."

"Come on again, then," panted Cecil, spurred forward by the fear of causing the death of her gallant little pupil, and she struggled on a few steps farther. Then a stone struck her on the shoulder, and she tottered and clutched at Azim Bey for support.

"I can't go on," she murmured, and the crowd behind, catching a glimpse of her and guessing her exhausted condition, set up a triumphant yell. Goaded on by the sound, she and her pupil made a last dash round a corner into another lane, where they came face to face with Charlie Egerton, who was walking serenely along, cigar in mouth.

"Miss Anstruther!" he gasped, and away went the cigar, and Charlie caught Cecil as she swayed to and fro.

"They are hunting us, monsieur!" cried Azim Bey, in great excitement. "They wish to massacre us! Take care of mademoiselle. As for me, I am going to attack that rabble there."

"Don't let him go," sobbed Cecil, feebly, as the boy unsheathed his dagger anew and started out against the foe, and Charlie grasped the situation.

"Nonsense, Bey; put up that penknife of yours, or keep it until we get to close quarters. Hang on to my coat and come with me."

To hear his highly-prized dagger called a penknife mortified Azim Bey excessively, and his dignity was also wounded by the familiar tone; but he pocketed his pride and obeyed, holding on to Charlie's coat on one side while the wearer supported Cecil along with as much tenderness as was compatible with extreme haste. The mob had rushed round the corner by this time, expecting to find an easy prey, but the change in the aspect of affairs rather staggered them, and they followed on in sullen silence for a little while, until their courage revived on realising that Charlie was alone and apparently unarmed. Once more the stones began to fly. One struck Charlie on the head, and Cecil received a blow on the ankle which nearly threw her to the ground.

"Brutes!" muttered Charlie, savagely, casting a hasty glance around in search of some place of refuge. None was visible, and he turned to Azim Bey, and said in his most reassuring tones, "This is warm work, Bey; rather too much of a good thing, in fact. Now suppose you see whether you can get Miss Anstruther on a little, while I try some practice with my revolver?"

"Don't keep him back with me; send him on," said Cecil. "Do you remember who he is?"

"Dear me! I forgot that I had Ahmed Khémi Pasha's son to look after," said Charlie. "Well, Bey, run on, and make for the Residency as fast as you can."

"I will not!" cried Azim Bey, indignantly. "My father is Pasha, and I am a gentleman. Shall I leave a lady to perish? No! I will rather shed the last drop of my blood."

"That's a brave little chap!" said Charlie. "Now let Miss Anstruther lean upon your shoulder for a minute;" and he drew a revolver from his pocket, and turning, presented it at the foremost of the mob, who were by this time unpleasantly near. The front rank recoiled precipitately, and Charlie seized the opportunity.

"Take my arm again, Miss Anstruther. Hold on tight, Bey. We have not much farther to go now."

They got on a little way, Cecil stumbling along with clenched teeth and brow drawn with pain. Then the mob began to press on them again, and Charlie fired over their heads. This daunted them a little, but they quickly came on anew, headed by a ferocious-looking ruffian who got near enough to make a snatch at Azim Bey. The boy struck out valiantly with his dagger, and Charlie turned and shot through the wrist the man who had seized him. This excited the pursuers to fury, and Charlie was obliged to walk backwards, threatening the crowd with his revolver, and doing his best to support Cecil at the same time. Happily the lane was so narrow that he was able to foil all attempts at passing him, for if these had succeeded the mob could easily have surrounded and annihilated the three fugitives, but they had a wholesome fear of the revolver in a spot where only two could comfortably walk abreast.

"Four shots more," said Charlie, half audibly, after a short experience of the difficulties of his present mode of progression, "and the Residency is still—— We shall never reach it at this rate. Here, Bey, you run on until you come to the Residency, and tell them to

have the gate open and to call out the guard. Run your hardest, and tell them we are in for a row."

"I will not run," said Azim Bey. "I am not a coward. Do you run on, monsieur, and leave me to defend mademoiselle."

Charlie stamped with impatience, and his revolver went off without his intending it. He turned to the Bey with a very ugly look on his face, and uttered words which it took long for the Pasha's son to forgive or forget.

"Look here, small boy," he said, "you will obey orders, if you please. Do you think I would bother myself with you if I didn't care more for Miss Anstruther's finger-tip than for the whole of your wretched little body? I might have been able to defend her alone, but you are endangering us both. I tell you what, if you don't go, I'll put a bullet through your head, and have no more trouble with you. The only good you can do is to run on and give my message, and fetch help. If you don't, mademoiselle's death will lie at your door."

Away went Azim Bey, in a tumult of rage, indignation, and disgust, hard to imagine and impossible to describe. Charlie heard him running off, and calculated mentally how long he would be in reaching the Residency, and how long in returning with help. Almost at the same moment he found that he was deciding, half mechanically, on which of the leaders of the mob he should bestow his last three shots. He had some more cartridges with him, but he could not load with one hand, and Cecil was clinging, half-unconscious, to his left arm. Moreover, if the crowd saw him stop to load, they would be upon him instantly.

Meanwhile Azim Bey, rushing on, had found that the lane led into the street in which the Residency stood. Running up to the gate, he was stopped by the Sepoy sentry, who refused absolutely to allow him to enter. Here was a blow.

"Slave!" cried the boy, in a frenzy, "dost thou refuse me admittance? Thou knowest not that I am Azim Bey, the Pasha-Governor's son?"

To this the sentry, seeing only a small boy in a high state of excitement, with worn and ragged clothes splashed and mud-bespattered, replied merely by the Eastern equivalent of "Tell that to the marines," coupled with a little good advice as to civility of language, and continued to bar the passage. Azim Bey turned pale.

"I must get in!" he cried. "The men of the city are murdering Mdlle. Antaza. Show me the Balio Bey, your officer, the Mother of Teeth—any one—they will know me and send help."

But the sentry still smiled in grim incredulity, not unmixed with anger at the boy's disrespectful reference to Lady Haigh; and Azim Bey threw himself on the ground and cast dust upon his head, and wept and stormed in his despair. The more he cursed, the more the sentry laughed, until the noise attracted the attention of Captain Rossiter, an Engineer officer who was making the Residency his headquarters during a series of surveys which he was carrying out for the Indian Government within the borders of the pashalik, and who had lately been present at a *fête* at the Palace, where Azim Bey had seen him. He happened to be crossing the courtyard, and hearing the din, came to see what was the matter. To him Azim Bey rushed, and clinging to his hand, told his

tale of woe, while the tears poured down his grimy little face. The tale was very incoherent, and, moreover, it was related in a strange mixture of tongues; but Captain Rossiter understood enough of it to send him flying madly out into the street and down the lane, with as many of the Sepoys as he could collect at his heels, Azim Bey staggering after them, almost too much exhausted to walk.

They arrived at the scene of action in the nick of time, to find Charlie, his last shot fired, standing at bay in an angle of the wall, with the fainting Cecil all in a heap on the ground behind him, while he was doing his best to defend himself with the butt-end of the revolver. The arrival of the reinforcements turned the scale. The mob fled before the onslaught of the hated Hindus, and Charlie and Captain Rossiter lifted Cecil up, and half-carried her the rest of the way between them. Azim Bey, picked up on the return journey, was hoisted on the shoulders of one of the men, and they retraced their steps, to find that they must force their way through a large and angry crowd which had gathered in the street, and was hurling defiance at the Residency. All eyes were turned on them as they emerged from the lane, and a moment's hesitation would have been fatal. A yell of execration went up, a hundred hands were grasping missiles and were about to hurl them, but Captain Rossiter said something quickly to Charlie, and gave a sharp order. The Sepoys closed around, the two Englishmen caught up Cecil and carried her across the street at a run, and before the mob had guessed what was going to be done, they were parted as though by a wedge, the gate of the Residency was gained, and their intended victims were out of reach, the

stones and potsherds which they threw clattering on the stout doors as these were shut fast, and barred and bolted from within.

"Sharp work!" said Captain Rossiter to Charlie, wiping his face. "I say, I must go and report to the chief. You and Lady Haigh will look after Miss Anstruther, I suppose? She looks pretty bad."

He went off to Sir Dugald's office at once, and told him what had happened. Sir Dugald received the news with a look of weary resignation most piteous to behold. His whole diplomatic life was a struggle against the occurrence of what are euphemistically called "complications," and here was one brewing literally at his very door. He finished the sentence he was writing, folded his papers and locked them up in a drawer, carefully restoring the key to its place on his watch-chain, but as he walked across the courtyard with Captain Rossiter, his perturbation made itself audible in disjointed mutterings.

"Why couldn't they have taken refuge anywhere rather than here? That fellow Egerton is bound to bring trouble wherever he goes. On my word, it's 'heads you win, tails I lose,' with a vengeance. If the mob attack us, blood won't wash it out, and if we fire on them we shall have a blood-feud with all the Arabs in the country. Bringing that child here, too, as if to proclaim that we support Ahmed Khémi in all his wretched grinding oppression. We shall be identified with him in the Baghdadi mind for years. Subadar, turn out the guard."

The last sentence was addressed to the Sepoy officer, who was eagerly awaiting the order, and the soldiers marched down to the gate, where was gathered a crowd

of clerks, servants, interpreters, cavasses, and the other motley hangers-on of a consulate in the East, besides a number of people from outside who considered themselves "under protection," and always sought the Residency in haste at the first sign of a riot. These were all listening, pale with fear, to the repeated crashes as the mob amused themselves by throwing stones at the gate, but they made way with grateful confidence for Sir Dugald as he advanced, his face absolutely impassive once more, and examined the bars and bolts.

"So long as they are content with this," he said to Captain Rossiter, "we are all right. It's an insult to the flag, of course, but an apology will set it right. But if they get tired of throwing stones and making no impression, we must still try and keep them off without coming absolutely to blows. I will leave you in charge of the gate, Rossiter, but there must be no firing with ball except in the very last resort. Ah, listen to those mad idiots outside! They are trying to provoke the Sepoys. Send the men back to fetch sand-bags or anything that will strengthen the gate. Either keep them busy or keep them out of hearing."

Tired of throwing stones without result, the mob were now resorting to hard words. One man after another stood up at a safe distance and howled insults at the Sepoys, their families, and their whole ancestry, and any particularly telling phrase was caught up and echoed by the crowd. Sir Dugald's brow was furrowed with anxiety as he slowly retraced his steps from the gate, for these Sepoys were fresh from India, full of memories of annual conflicts with Moslems at the Hâli and the Moharram, and he could not tell how long they would stand the provocation they were receiving. From the

river-terrace he now sent off a messenger to the Palace, informing the Pasha of the situation, and begging him to send a sufficient force of soldiers to secure his son's safety and to enable him to return home, either by land or water. And meanwhile he lamented that this "complication" should have happened, as was only natural, at a time when the gunboat was away down the river.

CHAPTER XII.

IN SEARCH OF HEALTH.

WHILE Sir Dugald was taking his measures of precaution, Cecil had been carried into one of the rooms on the ground-floor of the outer court, and laid on the divan. Charlie rushed off to his surgery for bandages, and sent a servant to fetch Lady Haigh, who came at once, breathless and astonished, but capable and resourceful as ever. The first step necessary was to get rid of Azim Bey, who was crouched in a heap on the divan, looking like a little Eastern idol in very reduced circumstances, and to turn him over to the care of Sir Dugald's Indian valet for some necessary personal attention. But the last rush through the yelling mob seemed to have shaken the boy's nerve, for he was trembling and shivering, and his face was whitey-brown with fear. To Lady Haigh he looked exactly like a monkey in mid-winter, but she could not help pitying him as he shrank and cowered at every fresh shout of the mob outside. To her greeting and advice he paid but little heed.

"They are all saying we shall be killed, madame," with a nod in the direction of the knot of frightened servants near the gate, "and if we are to be

killed, why trouble about one's appearance? It is destiny?"

"It is your destiny just now to go with Chanda Lal, and have a bath and some clean clothes, if any one here has any small enough," said Charlie, returning with his bandages. "Now then, young man, off with you," and he evicted the boy summarily from the divan, and impelled him in the right direction with a gentle shove. Charlie was the surgeon now, not by any means the courtier, and he was not accustomed to have his orders disobeyed.

The business of dressing the wounded ankle was a long and painful one, and Cecil fainted again before it was over. Charlie fetched a restorative and administered it, and was leaving the room quietly, with an injunction to Lady Haigh not to allow the patient to be disturbed, when Cecil opened her eyes and half sat up.

"Oh, Dr Egerton!" she cried, and Charlie came back at once. "You mustn't think me ungrateful," she said, brokenly. "I do want to thank you—I can never tell you how much—for coming to our rescue as you did, and for saving us, especially the Bey. How should I ever have faced his father if anything had happened to him?"

"Especially the Bey?" repeated Charlie, slowly. "Well, I can't agree with you there, Miss Anstruther; but I'm glad he's all right, if you are pleased. He's not a bad little beggar, and I shouldn't wonder if he turns out rather well after all, now that you have got him in hand." This was a great concession, but Charlie was in an appreciative and magnanimous mood.

"I don't know what would have happened to us if you hadn't been there," pursued Cecil, excitedly. "I

thought it was all over, I could not move another step, and then we came round that corner, and you were there, and we were saved." There was a hysterical catch in her voice, but she hurried on. "What would they have done to us, do you suppose? I can't help thinking of that money-lender's wife and children, don't you remember? Their house was destroyed, and they were dragged out into the street, and trodden to death—trodden to death—by the crowd. And that was in this very province. They might have done the same to us—think of it!" and she broke into hard gasping sobs.

"But you are not to think of it," said Charlie, authoritatively, his professional instincts aroused. "You will make yourself really ill, perhaps bring on fever. What you are to do is to lie quietly here and rest, and Cousin Elma will sit with you and talk to you."

"But they are at the gate—they may break in at any moment," and Cecil looked round with terrified eyes.

"Oh, nonsense!" said Charlie. "Why, we have the Sepoys and Rossiter, and any number of men, to defend the place. Look at Cousin Elma; she isn't a bit frightened, and I know that if she thought there was any real danger she would be seeing what she could do to help in the defence. Now, Miss Anstruther, lie down again and try to go to sleep, and I promise you that if I see any signs of the mob's being likely to get in, I will come and carry you up to the roof. We can hold out there for any length of time. You can trust me, you know."

"Indeed I can," said Cecil, putting her hand into his.

"Then that is a bargain," said Charlie, retaining the

hand; "and now I must go and see whether I can give any help at the gate."

"Good-bye, then," said Cecil. "No, not good-bye, *auf wiedersehen*."

"Yes, *au revoir*," said Charlie, audaciously seizing the opportunity to kiss the hand he held, regardless of the glance of burning indignation which he received from Lady Haigh over Cecil's head. It was at this extremely unpropitious moment that Azim Bey elected to return, fresh from the manipulations of Chanda Lal, and gorgeous in the best raiment of the young son of the Armenian major-domo. He stood transfixed for a moment at the door, astonishment making him dumb, then withdrew behind the curtain, and pounced upon Charlie as he came out.

"How dare you, monsieur?" he cried, flinging himself upon him like a wild cat. "You shall not look at mademoiselle like that. She is my mademoiselle, she is not yours. I will not have you touch her hand, you——" And here followed a string of outrageous epithets in very choice Arabic, a language extremely rich in such words, and lending itself abundantly to purposes of abuse.

"Stop that," said Charlie, giving the boy a shake which sobered him, and putting him down on the divan with no very gentle hand. "You are the Pasha's son, are you? Why, you are as bad as the most foul-mouthed little blackguard in the streets. Don't let me hear any more of such language, and don't talk any nonsense to Miss Anstruther, or I'll—I'll keep her here at the Residency for six months on a medical certificate!"

And Charlie went off whistling to the gate, only to be reminded by Sir Dugald that he was a non-com-

batant, and ordered to remain in the rear unless matters came to extremities, an order which seemed to him somewhat ludicrously unfair after the events of the day. As for Azim Bey, he shook his small fist after Charlie's retreating form, and then, peeping round the curtain, glared solemnly and ferociously at Cecil. He found her, however, quite unconscious of his gaze, for the exhaustion had returned again after the momentary excitement, and she was lying still with closed eyes. Obeying Lady Haigh's warning finger, Azim Bey tiptoed noiselessly into the room, and took up his post again on the divan, where he seemed inclined to remain. But this did not suit Lady Haigh, for the boy's unchildlike ways always irritated her, and his fixed and solemn gaze now made her feel nervous, and she suggested that he should go up to the house-top and see what was going on. This he was graciously pleased to do, seeing that Charlie was safely out of the way, and for the next half hour he occupied himself satisfactorily in keeping Lady Haigh acquainted with all the details of the situation. The mob had temporarily turned their attention from the Residency to the shops near, which they were pillaging in search of arms, and Azim Bey's shrill little voice grew excited as he described the scene. But a more important discovery than the damascened sword-blades and old-fashioned matchlocks, which were all that could be obtained from the armourers' shops, and which did not promise to be of much use against an enemy protected by stone walls, was a great beam of wood, which was now dragged up in triumph by the mob with the evident intention of its being used as a battering-ram.

Things began to look serious at this point, and Sir

Dugald ordered the Sepoys to be posted at the windows commanding the space in front of the gate, whence they might pick off the assailants if they ventured to come to close quarters. The non-combatants now took the place of the Sepoys in bringing bags of earth to strengthen the gate on the inside, and the more warlike among them got out such weapons as they happened to possess, with the intention of giving the enemy a warm reception if they succeeded in forcing their way in. The female portion of the establishment, with the natural instinct of seeking companionship in times of terror, crowded into the room where Lady Haigh was watching over Cecil, and there lamented their hard fate in tones of abject fear. Charlie, on his way to the gate from his surgery, looked in to reassure them, and also to entreat that they would make less noise, but found that they rejected all his comfort. To give them something to do, he allowed them to move Cecil into the inner court, and establish her at the foot of the staircase which led to the roof, so as to be ready to retreat thither in case it was necessary. Aided by the combined exertions of all the women, and also by the encouraging remarks of Azim Bey, the move was effected; but it caused Cecil too much pain for her to be willing to attempt the stairs. In vain did her pupil offer her his place, from whence she might obtain an excellent view of all that was to be seen; the exertion of mounting to the roof was too great, and she dropped down on the cushions which had been placed for her in the corner, where the staircase shielded her from the strong rays of the setting sun.

The men in charge of the battering-ram seemed to have been deterred from using it by the sight of Sir

Dugald's preparations, and they were now gathered together at a safe distance from the gate, squabbling noisily over their engine of warfare, and apparently trying each to persuade the other to lead the attack. The main body of the besiegers kept up a desultory shower of stones at the gate, varied by a flight directed at the roof when any one was visible there, and Sir Dugald sent up orders that the women were to keep well below the parapet, and not to show themselves. Azim Bey was in high glee as he dodged the stones, and did his best to return them to the senders; but Lady Haigh chafed under his father's delay in sending relief.

"It's all very well, my dear," she said to Cecil, "but I shouldn't wonder if this riot came in very opportunely for the Pasha. Here he has the chance of getting rid at once of Azim Bey, who is so unpopular, and whose very existence drives the Arabs to quarrel, and of the Balio Bey, who is always giving him good advice. Ah, you may laugh, but did you ever know any one to like the person who gave him good advice? Ahmed Khémi Pasha hates Sir Dugald because he knows that if he had done as he advised all along this would not have happened, and what could be a neater way of revenging himself than to let the mob have time to break in and massacre us all? He could punish them afterwards, and so escape all blame."

"But what would he do if Azim Bey were killed?" asked Cecil, with a feeble smile, caused by Lady Haigh's ineradicable suspiciousness.

"Do? Why, make it up with Hussein Bey, and so have everything comfortable in the Palace and the city and the whole pashalik, of course," replied Lady Haigh, promptly.

Cecil was about to remark that in such a case the Pasha would probably find it hard to deal with the Hajar Arabs, who had adopted Azim Bey's cause so zealously; but Lady Haigh was summoned to the roof at this point by a cry of joy from the Bey himself, who called out that there was a squadron of cavalry advancing from each end of the street into which the Residency gate opened. The two bodies were approaching each other, slowly and determinedly, forcing the sullen mob before them as they came. The men who had been squabbling over the battering-ram seemed all at once to determine to unite against this new foe, and turned to oppose them, whereupon a scene began which made Lady Haigh retreat down the stairs into the court in horror, but which caused Azim Bey to clap his hands and shout. The soldiers, with their heavy sabres, mowed down the mob as they advanced, until the few who were left broke their ranks and did their best to shrink close to the walls on either side and slip past the horses. The orders of the troops were evidently to secure the safety of the Residency and its inhabitants first, and to leave the punishment of the insurgents until afterwards, for when once the way was clear they allowed the survivors to escape if they could.

Azim Bey had been cheering on the soldiers from his coign of vantage on the house-top, but he was the first to descend, and was ready to meet them when the gate was opened. His fear and his anger and his excitement had now alike passed away, and he was his usual courteous, grown-up little self, thanking Sir Dugald for his hospitality and protection, and Captain Rossiter and the Sepoys for their timely aid. Notwithstanding his affability, however, he displayed great anxiety to get

back to the Palace, and would not hear of allowing Cecil to remain at the Residency even for the night, in spite of Lady Haigh's declaring that she would not permit her to leave it. It was obviously impossible for her to mount a donkey, and Charlie was firm on this point, although, remembering his encounter with Azim Bey, he kept in the background as much as he could, for fear of getting Cecil into trouble with her pupil and his father. Baghdad could produce a few carriages, but the streets were far too rough and narrow to admit of their use. At last an antiquated litter, borne by two mules, was procured from the Palace, and Cecil was helped into it and made comfortable with cushions. Then the gold-embroidered curtains were drawn, and the procession started, Azim Bey riding in front of the litter on a horse lent by Sir Dugald, while the soldiers formed an escort on either side.

"Do you know, Cousin Elma," said Charlie, as the party at the Residency lingered on the verandah after dinner to discuss the exciting events of the day, "I fancy"—he lowered his voice as he glanced across at Sir Dugald and Captain Rossiter, who were deep in an argument on the probable effects of the battering-ram if it had been used—"I can't help thinking that that small boy has taken it into his head to be jealous."

"It's quite possible, Charlie. My youngest brother was frantically jealous when I was engaged, though you mayn't believe it."

"But that was quite different. He had something to take hold of; but really I can't think what that little wretch has seen—until to-day, at any rate."

"Charlie, Charlie," said Lady Haigh, in her most maternal tone, "let me give you one piece of advice.

You are perfectly at liberty to think yourself a fool if you like, but never let yourself imagine that Azim Bey is one. If he ever permits you to think so, that will only show how well he is fooling you."

Charlie had leisure to think over this unpalatable remark in the days that followed, for he and Cecil did not meet again for some time. Cecil's foot was very painful, and the pain, combined with the shock of that eventful day, brought on another attack of fever, which spread mingled anxiety and hope among the European colony at Baghdad. The authorities at the French Consulate rejoiced in anticipation of Cecil's final removal from the scene, and were prepared with a candidate of unexceptionable qualifications to supply her place. The Austrian representative, while preserving an appearance of decorous sympathy, had his eye on an elderly relative of his own who had occupied a position in a princely family, and was well suited, both by character and training, to tread the tortuous paths of domestic diplomacy. A casual remark dropped by the French Consul in Azim Bey's hearing enlightened him as to the intrigues that were maturing, and the speculations that were abroad as to the issue of his dear mademoiselle's illness, and threw him into a pitiable state. He passed his time in alternate fits of wild despair and petulant anger, which so affected his father that he sent for his own physician, who was attending the patient, and ordered him, on pain of death, to effect her recovery—a command which was received by the hapless man of medicine with an impassive "If God pleases, it shall be as my lord wills." Lady Haigh also was untiring in her care. She came to see Cecil every day, and often sat with her for hours, only to meet, when she left the Palace, the reproaches

of Charlie, who invariably accompanied her to the gate, and tried warning, entreaty, and menace in vain to induce her to take him in with her.

"She ought to see an English doctor," he urged. "What can this man know about English constitutions? I have no confidence in him."

"But I have every confidence in him," responded Lady Haigh, severely; "and so has Sir Dugald, and so has the Pasha. Why, you know he was trained in Germany. Besides, Cecil herself has expressed no wish for a change of doctors (and I really can't wonder at it, after your behaviour the last time you saw her); and you know it would be absolutely unprofessional for you to intrude uninvited on one of the *hakim bashi's* cases."

"What do I care about professional etiquette in such a case?" cried Charlie. "Besides, if we come to that, she was my patient first. Cousin Elma, let me see her."

"No, indeed," said Lady Haigh, resolutely. "You let me in for one *faux pas*, Charlie, when you frightened me into sending you to the Palace before, and that is not a pleasant thing for a woman in my position to have to remember. How it is that we have never had any remonstrance about your invasion of the harem precincts on that occasion I cannot imagine, unless you bribed Mas'ud heavily. Well, there is not going to be any repetition of that sort of thing. Cecil is getting on perfectly well, and Um Yusuf and old Ayesha and Basmeh Kalfa all nurse her devotedly, so you must be content with that."

And very much against his will, Charlie was obliged to be content with that, and did not even see Cecil when she was better, for as soon as she was convales-

cent she was sent with Azim Bey and their attendants to the house of Naimeh Khanum, the Pasha's married daughter, at Hillah, to recruit. The journey of fifty miles was performed in great state, under the conduct of a large escort of mounted Bashi Bazouks. Three of the Pasha's own horses, with splendid trappings, were led in the forefront of the procession, and flags and kettle-drums gave it a martial air. The way lay entirely through the desert, and the prospect was always the same, the wide sandy plains being crossed and re-crossed by the dry channels of the ancient irrigation canals, now choked and useless, even the drinking-water having to be carried in leathern bottles. At night halts were made at the fortified khans on the road, where the terror of the Pasha's name proved sufficient to ensure the provision of all necessities for the travellers. The journey was taken in easy stages, that Cecil's strength might not be overtasked, and it was not until four days after leaving Baghdad that the palm-groves and the mighty rubbish-heaps of Hillah came in sight. Cecil felt her strength and her enthusiasm revive at the prospect. Before her lay the ruins of Babylon! She entreated that they might turn aside to visit them at once, but Um Yusuf proved most unsympathetic, and scornfully refused to communicate her mistress's wish to the leader of the caravan. Who cared about old ruins, haunted by ghouls and jinn, and just at the fever-time too? Did Mdlla. Antaza wish to throw her life away? Cecil yielded with a sigh, and the procession passed on through the palm-groves, where the ripening dates hung like bunches of golden grapes, to the house of Said Bey, Naimeh Khanum's husband, who was the military governor of Hillah.

Here Cecil and her pupil passed several quiet weeks. They did little exploring, for Cecil was not strong enough for it, and Azim Bey was deterred by fear of the jinn, but antiquities in abundance were brought to them to purchase by the Jews of the place, who spent their lives in searching for them. Azim Bey passed most of his time in his brother-in-law's company, riding out with him to hunt, and assisting him to review his troops, to the intense amusement of Said Bey, who was a big jolly man, the son of an Irish renegade who had entered the Turkish service, and preserved some of the national characteristics even among his oriental surroundings. As for Cecil, she resigned herself to a thoroughly Eastern existence as a denizen of the harem, and became better acquainted with the manners and customs of its inhabitants than she had had opportunity to be during her stay in Baghdad. Said Bey's mother was dead, as Naimeh Khanum informed her with evident relief and gratitude to Providence, and the household was therefore under the rule of the young wife, who was now much occupied with a wonderful baby son, of whom Azim Bey was intensely jealous, as he always was of every one and everything that interfered with the attention he conceived to be due to his imperious little self. The proud mother, who had herself enjoyed for a short time the advantage of the teaching of a European governess, was eager to consult Cecil as to the best way of educating her boy when he grew older, and many were the anxious discussions they held under the date-palms in the garden or in the evening on the terrace. Naimeh Khanum's lovely face appeared on almost every page of Cecil's sketch-book, only rivalled in popularity by endless studies of the great mounds of Babylon, seen under every possible variety of light and shade, and the

English girl felt herself strangely drawn to the oriental, who looked out from her cage at the unknown world with eager inquisitive eyes. They used to spend hours in conversation, Cecil sketching, Naimeh Khanum busy with her baby, until the warning cry of "*Dastûr!*" announced the return of Said Bey, and Cecil would wrap her veil round her and retire to the temporary school-room, where her pupil would be waiting to tell her of the day's adventures.

CHAPTER XIII.

INSTRUCTION AND INTROSPECTION.

ON the last evening of her stay at Hillah, Cecil became acquainted with an interesting fact concerning Azim Bey which at once touched and amused her. "A marriage had been arranged" for him long ago with Safieh Khanum, the little daughter of the Pasha of Mosul, and the wedding would take place when the bridegroom reached his eighteenth year.

"My grandmother arranged it," said Naimeh Khanum, playing with the bits of red stuff which were sewn to her baby's cap to keep off the evil eye. "The Pasha is a man of the old school, and a very rigid Mussulman, and the Um-ul-Pasha thinks that Safieh Khanum will keep my brother back from becoming altogether a Frangi."

"But have they never seen one another, poor little things?" asked Cecil. "What a pity that you couldn't have asked the little girl to stay with you while we were here. They might have taken a fancy to each other."

"*Ei donc, mademoiselle!*" laughed Naimeh Khanum. "You don't think that Safieh Khanum's parents would ever have allowed such a thing? Besides, in no case would she be allowed to come near you, or under your

influence. They would be afraid of your making her a Christian."

"But Azim Bey is always with me," objected Cecil.

"That is different," said Azim Bey's sister; "he is a boy. They know that there is no danger for him. But what has Islam for a woman?"

"Have you felt this, Khanum?" asked Cecil, in surprise.

"How can I help it? I have read your books, I have seen the difference between your life and ours," said Naimeh Khanum. "Our people think justly that there is little need for fear in the case of boys like my brother. They read of Christianity, they see your laws and their results, they think it is all very good. They are also taught our religion, and they say: 'It is destiny. I was born a Mussulman. My father and all my ancestors were good Moslems. Why should I change a religion that was good enough for them?' In this way they agree together to dismiss the subject. They have many things to occupy their thoughts, and if in their secret hearts they know that Christianity is better, it does not trouble them themselves, and they say nothing to any one else. They have all they want, but with us it is different. All the long, long hours—what can we do but think and wish? They should not have educated us, have let us read about your beautiful life in Frangistan, if they wished us to remain contented with what satisfied our grandmothers. We are tired of our jewels, and our novels, and our embroidery; tired of making sweetmeats and eating them; we are so tired—you cannot imagine how tired—of being shut up always in the same rooms, with the same faces round us. We are not like birds or wild animals, to be kept in cages, we have minds and hearts, and we want to be able to

go out in the world with our husbands, and enter into all they do."

"But couldn't you do that now—partially at least?" suggested Cecil, diffidently, surprised by this passionate outburst from languid-eyed, contented Naimeh Khanum.

"How can we?" she asked. "Our husbands go out into society without us. They meet the Frangi ladies, talk to them, dance with them, and then come home to us, poor ignorant creatures, who cannot talk to them of the things they care for, and don't know how to please them when we are most anxious to do it. Our husbands are the sun to us; we are less than the moon to them."

"But how can any one help you if you don't help yourselves?" asked Cecil.

"What are we to do?" asked Naimeh Khanum. "They say that our rights are secured to us by law, but what we want is the sole right to our own husbands. With that we might be able to do something, but how dare a woman be anything but submissive when she may find herself divorced, or set aside for another wife, on account of the slightest effort for freedom? We need martyrs in our cause; but who will be the first? How can a woman who loves her husband, slight as her hold is on him, alienate herself from him deliberately?"

"But you cannot fear anything of the kind with Said Bey," said Cecil, losing sight of the general question in this particular case. "He would never set you aside for another wife."

"No, because I am the Pasha's daughter. But he has the right. Suppose my father fell into disgrace, or anything happened to my boy," and she made with a horrified look the sign for averting the evil eye, "who would stand up for me then? Almost every one has

more than one wife; why should I expect my husband to be the exception? There is my father, he is considered a liberal-minded man, of most advanced views, and yet he has just married a fourth wife. It was all arranged when you were ill, so I suppose you did not hear much about it; but she is coming here with him to-morrow. She is Jamileh¹ Khanum, the daughter of his old friend, Tahir Pasha. Her father is also a reformer, and she has had an English governess, and been brought up entirely *alla Franca*, but she can't refuse to become the fourth wife of a man almost old enough to be her grandfather."

"And what can remedy this?" asked Cecil.

"Only Christianity," said Naimeh Khanum. "They have tried culture and civilisation, but it has done no good. Our men do not care to raise us even to their own level."

"Then why are you not a Christian?" asked Cecil.

"Because I have too much to leave," said Naimeh Khanum, slowly and deliberately. "I cannot give up my husband and child. As it says in one of your books which I have read, I have given hostages to fortune. Listen! there is Said Bey coming in. I must go to meet him. Adieu, mademoiselle."

And she was gone, leaving Cecil to meditate on the unexpected revelation she had received. It was with deep sadness and remorse that she took her way to the room where Azim Bey was waiting for her, for who could say how much she might have helped this struggling soul in all these weeks if she had only known? Poor Naimeh Khanum! she was longing for the temporal blessings of Christianity without thought of the

¹ This name is also spelt Gemila, Djamilé, and Jameelie. The last form gives the pronunciation.

spiritual. They had no further opportunity for conversation, but Cecil did the best she could for her friend. Wrapping up carefully a little New Testament in Arabic which she had received from Dr Yehudi, she placed it where Naimeh Khanum would be sure to find it, with a prayer that the seeker might be led into the light.

The next day Ahmed Khémi Pasha arrived, accompanied by his bride, and attended by a magnificent retinue. There was only time for a formal interchange of visits between Naimeh Khanum and her new step-mother, for the Pasha was making a progress through his dominions, and it was already late in the year. It would have been equally undesirable for Azim Bey and his governess to return to Baghdad in the Pasha's absence, and to remain at Hillah, tasking the resources of Said Bey for the maintenance of themselves and their attendants, and their cavalcade was accordingly merged in the larger one, they themselves losing their comparative importance, and becoming part of the harem procession under the lead of Jamileh Khanum, who travelled in state at its head in a highly ornamental *takhtrevan*, or mule-litter.

In honour of his marriage, the Pasha had remitted a large proportion of the obnoxious taxes which had contributed so largely to swell the distress of the province, and this had restored much of his popularity. There was also every prospect of a good corn and fruit harvest, the latter very important to the dwellers in the regions around Baghdad ; and as time went on, and this promise was fulfilled, past irritation was forgotten, and the people returned to their usual condition of sleepy contentment. Azim Bey attracted no unfriendly attention, and Cecil went through the tour in safe and undis-

tinguished obscurity. Jamileh Khanum monopolised the attention of the Pasha, and was the undisputed head of her own portion of the assemblage. She was a young lady of some shrewdness and much ambition, and had signalised the short period she had spent at Baghdad by such a violent quarrel with the Um-ul-Pasha, that her husband dared not leave her behind in the Palace. With a natural instinct to like everything that the Um-ul-Pasha disliked, she had come prepared to patronise Azim Bey and Mademoiselle Antaza, and she and Cecil got on very well together. England was their great theme of conversation, for Jamileh Khanum cherished a secret hope that she might one day prevail upon the Pasha to take her there on a visit. With this in view, she was eager to learn from Cecil all she could with regard to English customs and etiquette, although she maintained throughout a lively sense of the difference of position between the great lady and the governess. Cecil found her very amusing, but Azim Bey, who was wont to sit by and look on at the conversations with unwinking black eyes, mistrusted the "little lady mother," as he called his father's youngest wife.

"It is all petting and sweetmeats now, mademoiselle," he said to his governess, "but wait until she has a son of her own."

"But that can make no difference to you, Bey," said Cecil. "You have his Excellency's promise, given to your mother."

"On whom be peace!" said Azim Bey, quickly. "But if I were dead, mademoiselle? You have seen already how greatly I am beloved in the harem."

"Don't be so suspicious," said Cecil. "I thought you prided yourself on your strength of mind?"

"So be it, mademoiselle," said the boy. "What is to happen will happen. We shall see."

In spite of these little rubs, however, the journeying life was very pleasant to Cecil, and she even looked forward with a certain degree of dread to the time when she must exchange the blue wrapper and high boots she wore in riding for the trailing dress and white sheet of the Palace. Everything out here was so entirely new, and she was separated from the troublesome personal questions and problems which had worried her lately at Baghdad. In these the chief factor was Charlie Egerton. She had never seen him since the day of the riot, when he had so suddenly and unwarrantably kissed her hand, but this was by her own wish, for she felt that she did not know how to meet him again. Anger at his presumption, and rage against herself for the display of weakness which had emboldened him to the act, combined to embitter her against him. And yet she could not keep him out of her thoughts. Her mind dwelt on the scene at the Residency so constantly that she became alarmed. What did all this mean? She must get away from Dr Egerton's disturbing influence, and think the matter out calmly. With this in view, she had acquiesced in hurrying on her departure from Baghdad without seeing him, and she had since taken full advantage of her opportunity for thought.

She had never exactly formulated to herself her views of an ideal lover, but she was vaguely conscious that, allowing for the difference of standpoint, her requirements were much on a level with those of the seventeenth-century poet who sang the praises of the "not impossible she." And here, as she could not help perceiving, was the real lover—Charlie Egerton, frivolous,

unstable, unsuccessful. These were the hard epithets she applied to him, while all the while admitting to herself that she could not help liking him, and that there was something noble and quixotic about his unfortunate efforts to keep other people up to their duty. But here again the softness of her own mood alarmed her, and she proceeded to examine into her feelings with all the systematic thoroughness of a practised student of mental science. After long cogitation, and much analysis of complex emotions into their elements, she came to the conclusion that she was not in love with Charlie. She even assured herself that she despised him a little, and this was obviously an insurmountable bar to love. But the chief drawback to the introspective method of studying mental phenomena is, as the text-books tell us, the danger of the mind's forgetting its own states, or even misinterpreting them, owing to the distracting influence of personal fears and wishes. This Cecil forgot, while assuring herself that her clear duty now was to show Charlie plainly what her feelings were. It would be unkind to allow him to labour any longer under a delusion, and she became at last almost anxious to return to Baghdad, for the sake of undeceiving him.

By the time that this desirable conclusion was reached, the steps of the travellers were really turned homewards. Jamileh Khanum was tired of wandering, and if the truth must be told, was "spoiling for a fight" with the Um-ul-Pasha. Where every one was anxious to do what she wished, there was no excuse for bad temper, and she felt that her choicest weapons were being wasted, while the enemy was doubtless making the best use of her time by entrenching herself more strongly. Accordingly, the young lady intimated to

her husband that the tour had lasted long enough, and the Pasha gave orders for the return. His Excellency's long absence had so far made the heart of the Baghdadis grow fonder that they pressed to meet him and greeted him with acclamations, which were especially pleasing to him as tending to prove that the Balio Bey had been wrong in his dismal prognostications. Even Azim Bey received a special ovation, and the official who had acted as the Pasha's deputy in his absence reported that Sir Dugald Haigh, and the English colony generally, had quite regained their former popularity.

As for Cecil, she felt as though she were returning home, and the sight of the Residency almost brought tears to her eyes. She could scarcely wait until Sunday to get news of her friends, and they on their part gave her the warmest of welcomes when her donkey reached the great gate. Lady Haigh exclaimed on her improved appearance, Sir Dugald paid her a courtly compliment on her looks, and Captain Rossiter and the other young men who were employed at the Consulate in various capacities expressed in their faces as much pleasure and admiration as they dared. But there was something wanting even in this wealth of greeting. Charlie Egerton did not appear, nor add his voice to the chorus. Although Cecil had come back resolved to snub and repress him,—for his own good, of course,—she could not help feeling that there was undeserved unkindness in this absolute neglect. He must have known that she was coming home, and that he should have chosen this special occasion on which to visit old Isaac Azevedo, or even Dr Yehudi, showed a callousness which she had not expected in him. It was not until she was closeted with Lady Haigh for a good

talk, after morning service, that she heard the reason of Charlie's absence.

"My dear," cried Lady Haigh, when Cecil had remarked casually that she supposed Dr Egerton was visiting some of his friends, "Charlie isn't in Baghdad at all. Haven't you heard? He has been sent off on an expedition into the Bakhtiari country, and may be away for months."

"Indeed!" said Cecil. It was all that she could say.

"Yes, indeed. And you never heard about it? Well, I will tell you. You know that there has been a good deal of talk lately about a mysterious epidemic which has sprung up among the Bakhtiaris, and seemed to be spreading along the Gulf? The Indian Government were getting very nervous about it, and Sir Dugald has had a great deal of correspondence with them on the subject. At last it was suggested that a medical commission should visit the district, and try to find out the root of the disease, and see exactly what conditions caused it to spread. The idea was taken up, and it was settled that the commission should consist of a doctor sent by the Shah (the Bakhtiaris are under Persia, you know), and Charlie, representing our Government. They know his worth, you see, though they have treated him so badly. And so he started, just a fortnight ago now."

"And of course he was glad to go? It must have been like going back to his old ways again," said Cecil. Lady Haigh turned upon her a look of scorn.

"Charlie has quite given up his old wandering ways," she said, "and no one ought to know that better than you, Cecil. He has settled down into steady work, and gets on splendidly with Sir Dugald. Of course

was glad to get the medical experience involved this journey—I won't pretend he wasn't. But he was most unwilling to go just when you were coming home; in fact," added Lady Haigh, forgetting her previous laudation of Charlie's steady work, "it was all I could do to keep him from throwing up the whole thing, and he is determined to be back by Christmas."

Lady Haigh might have told much more if she had wished to do so, but she was a discreet woman, and was rarely tempted into obscuring a general effect by excess of detail. Charlie had not accepted the fact

of his temporary exile by any means in a spirit of resignation, and his long-suffering cousin had had to endure a good deal before he finally departed. His chief objection to leaving his post had been the possibility that some epidemic might break out in his absence, and sweep away the whole European population of Baghdad; but Lady Haigh pooh-poohed his anxiety, and assured him that the surgeon of the *Ausicaa* was fully competent to fill his place.

"And you know, Charlie," she said, "this appointment will bring you before the public, and may do you a great deal of good. It is a thing after your own heart, and you ought to be grateful for it."

"What I am thinking of, Cousin Elma," he replied, solemnly, "is that if I am away at Christmas, I may see everything that would make all this any good to me."

"My dear boy, what can you mean?" asked Lady Haigh, revolving various possibilities in her mind. Oh, I know!" she cried at last. "You mean that Cecil's first two years at Baghdad will be over a day or two before Christmas, and that she can't go on without signing a new agreement?"

"And that before she signs it I am to have my chance," added Charlie.

"Yes, of course," said Lady Haigh, hastily. "You have been a very good boy, Charlie, and obeyed me splendidly, but lately I have noticed a sort of I-bide-my-time air about you, which didn't look well. You shall have your chance, certainly, but I wouldn't advise you to be too sure about it."

"I am not," said Charlie, "but I mean to have it."

"Well, my dear boy," went on his cousin, soothingly, "travelling as lightly as you do, you will be well able to be back before Christmas, you see. The new agreement need not be signed until Christmas Eve, and if you are not back then it will be your own fault."

"But something might prevent me," he said, dolefully; "and only think if I came back and found that she had bound herself for another three years of slavery to that child!"

"You think that you could prevent it if you were here?" asked Lady Haigh, in the tone that she had used once before when casting a doubt on the likelihood of Charlie's success.

"I don't know," he said, humbly enough, "but I almost think, if I had her alone, and could make her listen to me, that I could."

"Well, that you must settle for yourself, of course. I will do my best for you, Charlie. Supposing (but I don't in the least anticipate it) that you are not back by Christmas Eve, I will tell Cecil the state of things before she signs the agreement. It may be that she is more homesick and tired of her work than she seems, and that she will be willing to listen to the proposal, but I can't promise you success. I only say I will do

what I can, for you have been very obedient, and behaved very well. That's all I can promise."

"Thank you awfully, Cousin Elma. It's very good of you. Only wouldn't it save you the trouble if I wrote her now, before I went?"

"What! you haven't had enough of Azim Bey and is suspicious yet?" asked Lady Haigh; and as Charlie shrugged his shoulders in silence, she went on with such animation, "Charlie, I really must have it out with you, though I know it's no good, but I will never refer to it again. Has it ever struck you how very foolish you are? Either by misfortune or by your own fault you have lost most of your chances, and come to be regarded either as a cranky clever fellow or as a pleasant good sort of man, but a most unlucky one. You ought to be thankful if you could get the most commonplace, unsophisticated girl that was ever brought up in a remote country village at home to take you, but no—you must fly high. You fall in love with a girl who is clever herself and can't help knowing it, who has had unusual advantages in the way of education, and whose talents command a fair market value. It is her interest not to marry you, and you will probably get into trouble even if you are merely engaged, and she laughs at you continually. Why don't you give her up?"

"I don't know," said Charlie, meditatively. "Because I love her, I suppose, Cousin Elma. I had rather she laughed at me than forgot me, at any rate."

"My dear boy!" said Lady Haigh, and kissed him, impulsively. "If only Cecil knew you as you really are!"

But Cecil did not know, and yet she cried herself to

sleep when she went back to the Palace that night. It could not have been on account of Charlie's absence, for she had satisfied herself that she did not love him, and it could scarcely have been because he had missed his snubbing, and therefore it must have been, as she said to herself the next morning, that she was tired and excited from seeing so many old friends again.

CHAPTER XIV.

A SPOKE IN HIS WHEEL.

NEITHER Cecil nor Azim Bey ever referred in words to the approaching termination of the former's engagement. Cecil had never in the slightest degree hesitated in her resolution to bind herself to remain at Baghdad for the further period of three years. The letters from Whitcliffe had of late been so uniformly cheerful in tone with respect to Fitz and Terry, for the expenses of whose education she had now for two years been wholly responsible, that she could not but conquer her longing to see the dear home faces once more, and decide to remain a member of his Excellency's household. Then, too, her little pupil had endeared himself to her, jealous and exacting though he often was, and she could not bear to think of leaving him. Thus her mind was made up, and she had no anticipation of anything that might interfere to prevent the signing of the agreement.

As for Azim Bey, his silence did not arise from lack of interest in the matter. He knew as well as Charlie did when the first agreement lapsed, and throughout the tour from which they had just returned his mind had been busy on the subject. Over and over again,

when he seemed merely to be contemplating the beauties of nature, or listening attentively to the morals which Cecil did her best to deduce for him from the various scenes and incidents of their daily life, he was occupied in planning schemes by which his governess's further stay might be ensured. It was clear to him that the cardinal point was that Charlie should be absent from Baghdad when the agreement was signed. Azim Bey's dislike for the surgeon of the Consulate was not a feeling of gradual growth, but had sprung up, fully matured, on the occasion of Charlie's unauthorised intrusion into the harem. With a good deal of natural shrewdness, and a great deal of precocity, stimulated by the unchildlike life he had led, and the books in which he had delighted, the boy had divined Charlie's secret, and marked him at once as an enemy. By catechising Cecil after all her visits to the Residency, he arrived at the knowledge that she always saw Dr Egerton there; and he remarked that she generally spoke of him with a sigh, but what this sigh meant he could not decide. In any case, he was fully persuaded that it would be far better for mademoiselle to remain with him for the next three years than to marry Dr Egerton. She was doing so much with her earnings for those brothers of hers (whom Azim Bey regarded with interest not unmingled with contempt, as creatures who existed for little else but to play pranks for his entertainment) that she certainly ought not to leave them in the lurch. He had never given a second thought to his loudly expressed intention of marrying her himself—which indeed had only been uttered in the hope of shocking his grandmother—and had resigned himself with philosophic indifference to the prospect of the bride who had been chosen for him; but he had some

dea that when his education was finished, his father, or rather Jamileh Khanum, might find mademoiselle a suitable husband in some rich Armenian, so that she might continue to live in Baghdad, and he might consult her when he needed advice. In any case, Dr Egerton, who had unintentionally made himself peculiarly disagreeable to the Bey, was out of the question, and must be got rid of.

It might have been supposed that the simplest plan would have been to appeal to Cecil herself, and secure her promise to stay on in her situation; but such a proceeding was quite contrary to Azim Bey's character and habits. His instinct was to work underground, and he heartily detested anything like plain questions and straightforward answers. "People in love always told lies," was the impression left upon his mind by his French novels; and even if mademoiselle should prove an exception, what good would it do to hear her say that she meant to leave Baghdad? A straightforward answer of that kind could not easily be explained away, whereas if everything were left in a misty, nebulous condition, with nothing determined, and nothing definite said, it ought to prove easy to find opportunities for action and loopholes for interference. That mademoiselle might, quite without her own knowledge, be managed into staying, if only Dr Egerton did not appear and interrupt the process, he had no doubt, and he began to revolve schemes for delaying his return. It was evident even now that matters must be run very close if Charlie was to be back a week before Christmas, and it seemed to Azim Bey that it ought not to be impossible, considering the absence of roads and the difficulties of obtaining transport in the Bakhtiari country, to make him arrive

from ten days to a fortnight late. This was all that would be necessary.

It was easy to see what ought to be done; the difficulty now came in of finding the person to do it. If only the Pasha had been in the secret, private instructions from him to the khan-keepers along the route to delay the progress of the travellers as much as possible, and to the postmasters to show no particular zeal in providing baggage-animals, would have settled everything; but Azim Bey did not wish to call in his father's help. It was doubtful even whether it would have been given; for instructions of this kind, recommending dilatoriness, had an unpleasant knack of becoming public at wrong times, and the Pasha was always anxious not to give undue cause of offence to the Balio Bey. In any case, his Excellency might think his son's desires inexpedient, and interfere to prevent their realisation; and this would be much worse for Azim Bey than merely being thrown on his own resources. Still, he found life very weary and perplexing while he tried to think of the right person to employ as his instrument in effecting his purpose.

Masûd and the rest of the servants he dismissed from his thoughts at once, they were too stolid, and would not make good intriguers. But Azim Bey had not been brought up in an atmosphere of intrigue for nothing; he knew exactly the kind of person who was fitted to undertake what Charlie Egerton called "dirty work," and the consuls, more euphemistically, "secret missions." Not quite for the first time, he began to regret that he had cut himself off so entirely from M. Karalampi, and to think that he might have refused his books without scathing him so fiercely with virtuous indignation. There were plenty of other dis-

reputable Greek and Levantine hangers-on at the Palace who might have been intrusted with the business, but men of this stamp were always ready, if anything led to the failure of their negotiations, to save themselves by splitting upon their employers. M. Karalampi alone, in such a case, never betrayed the interests he represented. He bore the blame of those involved and the scorn or execration of outsiders, he submitted to have his credentials denied and his action disavowed, and indemnified himself for it all on the next occasion. Such traits made him invaluable, and had probably contributed to his unusually long and successful career.

When there is mischief to be done, it is seldom that tools are wanting for the accomplishment of it, and when Azim Bey had been thinking of M. Karalampi for some days as a possible helper, he suddenly found himself face to face with him. It was in the early morning, when the boy had gone to pay his usual visit to his father as he dressed. Important despatches had just arrived, however, and the Pasha must not be disturbed in the perusal of them. In a very bad temper, Azim Bey settled himself in the anteroom, where visitors were wont to wait for audience of his Excellency. Only one other person occupied the room at present, and this was M. Karalampi, who saluted Azim Bey respectfully, and then retired to the farthest corner, to intimate that he had no desire to force himself upon him after the rebuff he had received more than a year ago. From his distant seat, however, he watched the boy's face narrowly, and read the varying thoughts which passed through his mind. Pride and eagerness were contending for the mastery, and M. Karalampi watched for the right moment at which

to intervene. He had not heard any of the circumstances, but hastily coupling with the deductions he drew from Azim Bey's perturbed face, Charlie's often-repeated intention of returning before Christmas (for he was well up in the gossip of the various consulates), he formed a working hypothesis, and proceeded to put it to the test. Approaching the divan on which Azim Bey was seated, he asked casually after the health of Mademoiselle Antaza, "*cette dame si aimable et si savante*," to whom the Bey was so deeply attached.

If Azim Bey had known that to the list of his employers M. Karalampi had lately added the name of the Um-ul-Pasha, he might have been suspicious, but he was so much relieved to find the conversation brought without his assistance to the very subject he wished to reach, that he answered politely at once that mademoiselle enjoyed the best of health.

"But the Bey Effendi will soon lose mademoiselle; is it not so?" was M. Karalampi's next question.

"What do you mean, monsieur?" asked the boy, startled.

M. Karalampi shrugged his shoulders. "All the world says that she will marry at Christmas the surgeon of the English Consulate," he said.

"But she shall not," cried Azim Bey. "Listen, monsieur; I need your help. He must be delayed in returning. He is not to be killed, nor hurt, because he saved mademoiselle and me in the riot, but simply kept back. Manage this, and I am your friend for life."

To recover his old position in the Bey's confidence was M. Karalampi's great object at this time, and he was also not averse to doing a bad turn to Cecil, but he looked serious and reflective.

"Do I understand you, Bey Effendi?" he asked. "There are to be difficulties among the tribes, you say, and Dr Egerton is to be detained for the sake of his own personal safety, while he is still at some distance from Baghdad?"

"Yes, that is it," cried Azim Bey; "and no letters must pass."

"That goes without saying," said M. Karalampi, "and it will not be difficult to find a cause of quarrel between the Hajar and their neighbours, the Fazz. But in the Bakhtiari country there are many robbers, and Englishmen are brave. Why should not the caravan be attacked, and Dr Egerton and the other doctor killed in repelling the thieves? That would get rid of him altogether, and no one could ever know."

Azim Bey turned a little pale. His schemes had not reached the point of plotting murder, but the idea seemed to come so quickly and naturally to M. Karalampi that he was afraid of appearing timid and cowardly if he told him so. However, a happy thought occurred to him.

"It is no use trying to work through the Bakhtiaris," he said. "They love the English, and might even tell him what we had arranged with them to do. And the Arabs must not kill him, for the Balio Bey would demand blood-money, and my father would be obliged to go to war with my own people to get it paid. No, they must only keep him back, protesting their love to the Pasha and to the English all the time. They will not allow him to go to his death, they must say, and no man can cross the Fazz country safely just then."

"The Bey Effendi is very wise," said M. Karalampi, "and it rejoices me to be able to serve him once more."

But I must have some token from him to show to the Hajar sheikhs, or they will laugh at my beard, and I shall come back a fool."

With trembling fingers Azim Bey unfastened the Hajar amulet which his Arab mother had hung round his neck when he was a baby. "It will bring all the tribesmen of the Hajar to thy help if thou art in danger, my son," she had assured him, and his kinsmen in the tribe had told him the same thing since.

"Take it," he said, "but give it back to me. No Hajar dare disregard it. But take care not to leave it in the tents, lest Dr Egerton see it, and perceive whose it is. Mademoiselle must never know of this."

"She never shall," said M. Karalampi, and he departed with his prize. Fortune had favoured him beyond his hopes, and he saw himself, in imagination, restored to his former place in Azim Bey's esteem, and able to manipulate his actions in the interest of his other employers. As for Azim Bey himself, he felt quite satisfied with the arrangement he had made, and returned to his governess with a light heart and an unclouded brow.

Cecil's visits to the Residency that autumn were almost confined to the Sundays. She explained to Lady Haigh that she had arranged a special course of study with her pupil, which must not on any account be interrupted, after the desultory way in which the summer had been spent, and she adhered to this plan with the utmost rigour, never acknowledging, even to herself, that the Residency seemed in some way empty and desolate just now. Sunday by Sunday she said to herself, hopefully, "Perhaps he came back last night," but the weeks passed on, and he did not come, and Cecil cried herself to sleep at nights,

and assured herself all the time that she did not love him, and that it was only because she was disappointed. Thus the days went by quietly enough until Christmas week approached. Still Charlie had not returned, although his letters to Lady Haigh announced that he had started upon the homeward journey. They were rather despondent in their tone, for his medical inquiries had occupied a longer time than he had calculated, but they all breathed a spirit of unconquerable determination to be back by the day before Christmas Eve, or die. Even if he had to tramp from Mohammerah to Baghdad, he would do it. But he reckoned without Azim Bey.

Cecil was to spend Christmas at the Residency. From the morning of Christmas Eve to the evening of Christmas Day she was to have her time absolutely to herself, and on Christmas Eve Denarien Bey and other officials were to bring the new agreement and present it for her signature. Azim Bey watched her depart without misgivings. His plans were laid securely, and if they did not come to a satisfactory conclusion, M. Karalampi would pay the penalty. Cecil nodded and kissed her hand to him as she started on her ride to the Residency, and he noticed that her white sheet was fastened with the elaborately wrought and jewelled brooch he had presented to her that morning, in pursuance of what he understood was the correct English custom. He was pleased with the honour shown to his gift, and accepted it as a good omen, and therefore he waved his hand gaily to Cecil, and called out that he would not torment old Ayesha, his nurse, more than he could possibly help while she was away.

Arrived at the Residency, Cecil found Lady Haigh in an extremely perturbed state of mind. Charlie had not returned, and no notice of his approach had been re-

ceived; moreover, there were rumours of troubles between the Hajar and the Fazz tribes in the very district through which he had to pass. In the course of a few hours Denarien Bey would bring the agreement to be signed, and if Charlie had not returned by that time, she would be obliged to speak to Cecil on his behalf, a prospect which filled her with nervous dread. To add to her perplexities, she had all the Christmas decorations on her hands, as well as the preparations for the Christmas Day festivities, in which she was handicapped by an undying feud which existed between such of the servants as were Hindus on one side, and Agoop Aga, the major-domo, and the natives of the country, on the other. With a vague idea of putting off the evil day, she accepted Cecil's offer to see to the decorations and the arrangement of the *menu* for the morrow's dinner-party, and departed to look to the ways of her household. But this delay was of no avail, for lunch-time arrived, and no Charlie. Denarien Bey was coming at three o'clock, and with beating heart poor Lady Haigh perceived that she must speak to Cecil. There was no time to lose, and after lunch she called the girl into her boudoir and prepared to make the attempt. She knew that she could not plead Charlie's cause with anything approaching the fervour he himself would have used; nay, she had an uneasy consciousness that if Cecil accepted him she would consider her an arrant fool for giving up her present position for his sake. But she was fond of Charlie, and sympathised with him on account of his patient waiting, and she felt herself bound by her promise to do the best she could for him.

"Cecil, my dear," she said, when she had got Cecil settled at last, after several vain attempts to reason her

into a properly serious state of mind, "Denarien Bey will come with the agreement very soon."

"Yes?" said Cecil, springing up from her chair and adjusting the striped scarf which draped a portrait on the wall. "But don't let us talk of business now, Lady Haigh. These two days are my holidays, you know, and I want to enjoy them. This is a new photograph of Sir Dugald, isn't it?"

"Oh, my dear child," entreated Lady Haigh, "do be serious. I have something so very important to say to you. I don't know how to say it, but I promised Charlie, and I wish I hadn't. Do listen to me quietly."

Cecil dropped into a chair, not that in which she had been sitting before, but a low one in the shade of the curtain, and composed herself to listen, for Lady Haigh's voice sounded as though tears were not far off.

"Poor Charlie has not come back in time," went on the elder lady, sadly, "and he was so very anxious to speak to you himself. But I must do it, or you will sign the agreement without knowing. He has been in love with you a long time, Cecil, ever since he has known you, in fact, and he wanted to ask you to marry him on the way up the river, but I wouldn't let him. I promised him that if he would let you alone for the first two years, to give you a fair chance of seeing how you could get on, he should speak to you before you signed the new agreement. Well, he isn't here, so I must speak instead. He is very much in love with you, my dear, though I should think you know that as well as I do, and if you don't, Azim Bey does. He has some money of his own, and Sir Dugald feels now that he can conscientiously put in a good word for him with the Indian Government if there is any question of

another appointment, and he is a dear fellow. There! I know I am not putting things properly, but I don't know how to manage it. He can't bear to think of your slaving, as he calls it, with Azim Bey all day; he wants you to be raised above the necessity of working for your family. He need not stay out here, you know, if it were not that he loves the East so much, he has a good property at home,—and he is a generous fellow. I am sure I may say that your little brothers would not suffer from the change. I might talk to you about a good position, and all that sort of thing, but I don't believe it would affect you. All I can say is, Cecil, don't let my blundering way of speaking for him prejudice you against the poor fellow, for he really is head over ears in love with you. Sometimes I think you don't appreciate him properly, but remember, he has waited patiently for two whole years, and only refrained from speaking out of pure consideration for you, lest you should be compromised in your new position. You have never shown him any special encouragement, always laughing at him and teasing him as you do, but he has never wavered, so if you can find it in your heart to say yes, do be kind to the poor boy."

There was a few minutes' silence, while the clock ticked heavily. Lady Haigh glanced nervously at Cecil, sitting in the deep orange shade of the curtain, but could read nothing from her face. At last the girl spoke, slowly and with some hesitation.

"I am glad you have spoken to me, Lady Haigh, for it seems to make it easier—I mean—yes, it is easier—to see the right course than if Dr Egerton had asked me himself. I think I am bound in honour to consider my duty to my employer, and to go on with my work. The Pasha has acted most kindly and honourably by me, and

he wishes me to carry on Azim Bey's education. I can't feel that it would be right, after all the trouble and expense he has had, to throw up my situation for the sake of a—well, of personal feelings. I think the Pasha would have a right to say he didn't think much of Christianity if I treated him in that way, and I have tried not to hide my colours in the Palace. I think it is only right for me to go on as I am."

"But you don't mind my having told you, dear? You are not angry with Charlie? What will you say to him?"

"That is scarcely a fair question, Lady Haigh," said Cecil, pausing with her hand upon the door, but keeping very much in the shade of the curtain; "or did Dr. Gerton depute you to receive his answer as well as to lead his cause?"

"Ah, she shan't get off like that," said Lady Haigh to herself, as the door closed behind her young friend. Charlie shall have his chance when he comes back and speak for himself, and I am very much mistaken if he doesn't get a little hope to help him through the next three years."

CHAPTER XV.

AFTER ALL——

BUT Christmas Eve passed on, the new agreement was brought and signed, and still Charlie did not come. The other young men looked at one another and laughed when they found that he had not appeared, and one or two betrayed symptoms of an inclination to take his place and monopolise Cecil. But they had no chance, as they were ready to acknowledge ruefully at night; for even if Miss Anstruther had been willing to let herself be monopolised, Lady Haigh would not have allowed it. She was very particular in keeping the conversation general in the drawing-room that evening, and in checking any tendency towards confidential talks. Captain Rossiter did once by a bold stroke succeed in getting Cecil to linger at the piano, trying over the accompaniment of a new song which had just reached him from England; but before he could guide the conversation round to anything more interesting than key-notes and sharps, Lady Haigh moved over to a chair close to the instrument, and the rest of the company followed.

Cecil did not sleep much that night. She had made definitely the momentous decision which had been

waiting her for so long, and had signed away her
for three years more, but it was not the thought
that kept her awake. She had heard Charlie
n's love declared, though not by himself, and the
ction made her heart beat fast. Even if (and
s not quite so sure about this as she had been
while ago)—even if she did not love him, she
not but feel touched both by his affection and his
ncy. But why had he not come back? Why,
declaring so openly his intention of returning,
lingered until after she had bound herself to
in Baghdad? What had detained him? Had
ng happened to involve him in one of the border
es which were continually occurring between the
ribes, or had the spell of the old wandering life
ed its power over him? If it were really the
Cecil felt that he might as well spare himself
ouble of coming back at all, so far as she was
ned. Ever since she had first met him she had
rately thrown her influence into the scale against
madic tastes, trying to induce him to settle down
y, and do his best, by persistent attention to
to counteract the effects of his earlier erratic
dings. It was a pity, she had felt sometimes,
man whose nature revelled in the unusual and
conventional should be guided so strenuously into
aten track, where another, with natural gifts of a
is remarkable order, would have filled his place
much more satisfaction to himself and to his
ors.

it was all for Charlie's own good. It must be to
vantage to be held back from sacrificing all his
cts to the impulse of a moment, and Lady Haigh
een unremitting in impressing upon Cecil that

whereas an eccentric, harum-scarum genius might do a great deal in the way of contributions to inexact science, the Indian Government, and indeed all governments, preferred the steady man who could be trusted to keep in the line marked out for him. Almost unconsciously Cecil had been setting this as a kind of test for Charlie in her own mind, watching, with an interest which she believed was wholly ethical and impersonal, his two years' struggle to stick to his work and avoid quarrelling with Sir Dugald. Hence she had come to the rather one-sided conclusion that she would certainly have no more to do with him if his efforts failed, while discreetly leaving a blank as to what was to happen if they were crowned with success. But in any case, if he could forget all that he had said, and the importance of haste, at such a time as this, and linger among the Bakhtiaris or the Hajar, it would be evident that his love was as little to be depended upon as his persistence in any walk of life had formerly been.

It was not wounded pride which actuated Cecil as she reasoned out this conclusion with herself, nor was it lack of sympathy with Charlie in the trials and worries of his uninteresting post at Baghdad. It was simply that she felt the lack of stability in his character, and the need there was for correcting it, and that she had a traitor on her own side to crush, in the shape of the unreasoning attraction towards Eastern and simpler modes of life which sometimes possessed herself. With Charlie this feeling was a passion, but in her it came only very occasionally into collision with her habitual fixedness of purpose and invariable caution. Still, the very knowledge of the existence of this tendency in herself made her harder upon Charlie, and more determined to guide him in the safe middle path

of daily duty steadily performed,—just as we are all prone to correct with greater willingness the faults we perceive in ourselves which are at variance with our general character,—and she felt, as she reviewed her conduct and advice mentally that night, that she could not reproach herself with what she had done. But she had now something else to consider—namely, what she was going to do—although the circumstances seemed so uncertain that she felt herself justified in leaving the matter open. Suppose Charlie had been unavoidably detained after all, and that he returned within the next few days, would he speak to her still, now that his speaking would come too late? She could not doubt for a moment that he would, but when he did, what would he say? Yes, and what would she say? These questions ran in her mind all night, in spite of the wise procrastination she had exercised in determining to leave the matter undecided.

“I really wish,” she said pettishly to herself, when she saw in the morning her pale face and tired eyes reflected in the glass—“I really wish now that he would stay away until to-morrow, so that I could get back to the Palace and be safe with Azim Bey without having to go through all this.” And so much worried and perturbed did she feel at the moment that she believed she meant what she said.

The morning passed quietly. The party from the Residency rode over to the Mission-house to join in the English service in the room which served Dr Yehudi as a church, and which was decorated with palm-branches and quaint devices arranged by the school-children, who mustered afterwards to receive good advice and sweetmeats from Sir Dugald, and presents from Lady Haigh and Cecil. Then the horses were brought up

again, and the visitors rode home, refusing to tax the scanty resources of the Mission party by staying to lunch. At the Residency the meal was despatched in haste, for all the members of the British colony in Baghdad were expected to join in the Christmas dinner that evening, and such a prospect necessitated a good deal of preparation. Sir Dugald retired to his office to escape from the bustle, and such of his subordinates as did not follow his example found themselves impressed into Lady Haigh's service for the purpose of moving furniture, hanging up draperies, and otherwise altering the appearance of the principal rooms. Cecil undertook the decoration of the dinner-table, much to the indignation of the Indian butler, who considered that he knew far more about dinner-parties than the Miss Sahiba, and Lady Haigh superintended everything, driving white-clothed servants before her in agitated troops.

It was in the midst of all this turmoil that Charlie came home. Lady Haigh heard him ride into the courtyard, and flew to greet him.

"O, my dear boy!" she cried, as he dismounted and came to meet her, "why didn't you come before? You are too late."

"She has signed the agreement, then?" he asked, quickly. Lady Haigh nodded, and he went on. "I thought as much. Thanks to that abominable child, I believe (for you know his mother was one of the Hajar), I have been detained in their tents for a week. They persisted that they were at war with the Fazz, and that I could not go on except at the risk of my life, and they kept me a regular prisoner. Twice I tried to get away, and each time they brought me back. Yesterday I managed to get hold of my revolver, which

they had hidden away, and we very nearly had a big fight. I threatened to shoot them all if they would not let me go, and at last they consented to disgorge the horses and my things, and my boy Hanna and I came on at once. We parted company this morning. He was to come on gently with the luggage, while I rode hard, and now it is too late after all."

"My poor dear boy!" cried Lady Haigh, the tears rising in her sympathetic eyes. "I did my best for you, really, but you see I could not plead as you would have done, could I? But you shall speak to her yourself. Leave it to me, and I will make an opportunity for you, only it must be when there is no one about, that people may not begin to talk."

"Thank you, Cousin Elma. It's something like a condemned criminal's last interview with his friends, to give me one talk with her before three years' separation."

"You were always inclined to be discontented, Charlie," said Lady Haigh, reprovingly. "Be thankful for what you can get, and now go and make yourself respectable."

He laughed, and betook himself in the direction of his own quarters. Cecil, at work in the dining-room, heard his steps on the floor of the verandah, and went on with her task of piling up crystallised fruits on the dessert-dishes with trembling fingers. Perhaps he would not see her as he passed. But he did. A casual glance into the room showed him that she was standing there, and he went no farther. An insane impulse seized her to run away when he came in, but she stood her ground, though looking and feeling miserably guilty. Charlie caught both her hands in his, and stood gazing into her flushed face with a look before which her eyes

fell. Then, almost before Farideh, the slipshod hand-maiden who was supposed to be assisting in the festive preparations, had time to profit by the little distraction to the extent of surreptitiously conveying an apricot to her mouth, he recollected himself, and loosing his hold of Cecil's hands, asked eagerly—

"You will let me speak to you in private some time or other?"

"Yes," faltered Cecil, and he went out, while she, suddenly discovering Farideh's part in the little scene which had just been enacted, taxed her with her guilt, and proceeded to give her a severe scolding in somewhat imperfect Arabic, though her lips would quiver sometimes with a smile in the sternest passages.

Lady Haigh was very mysterious that evening. She would not let Cecil go to dress for dinner until she herself could come too, and then she accompanied her to her room, where they found the two maids, Um Yusuf and Marta, gazing in speechless admiration at the contents of a great box they had just unpacked. With tender care they had laid on the bed a beautiful evening dress of soft, clinging white stuff, with borders of golden embroidery in a classic pattern, and now they were gently handling a white and gold cloak to match, and a fan of white feathers with a golden mount.

"My Christmas present to you, dear," said Lady Haigh, kissing Cecil. "I flatter myself I know what suits you, and I see my London dressmaker has carried out my directions exactly. Let me see how you look in it."

"O, Lady Haigh, you are too good!" gasped Cecil, fingering the delicate fabric with intense delight.

"Nonsense, Cecil! Do you think I didn't know that you decided not to order out a new evening dress from

home, because you wanted to send Fitz the money to get a camera with? I'm glad you like it, dear. If you are so very pleased, show it by looking nice in the dress, and by being kind to poor Charlie."

The last sentence was in a lower tone, but Cecil shook with mirth; the idea of being bribed with a new dress to be kind to Charlie seemed so ridiculous. The thought suddenly came to her of the uncontrollable delight with which her little Irish stepmother would have viewed the whole scene, more especially the part which concerned the unexpected rewarding of her kindness to Fitz, and it was with difficulty that she restrained herself from bursting into a peal of laughter. It did not take long to array her in the wonderful white-and-gold dress, and even the sedate Um Yusuf, as she clasped the folds upon the shoulder with Azim Bey's brooch as a finish, was moved into uttering words of admiration. Lady Haigh and Marta were no whit behind in their praise, and Cecil herself, on looking into the glass, felt that she could scarcely recognise the gorgeous vision there reflected.

Lady Haigh was also arrayed suitably to the greatness of the occasion, and she and Cecil now donned their cloaks in preparation for crossing the court, and rustled down to the great drawing-room, where Sir Dugald was waiting with a long-suffering expression, his subordinates hovering in the background and looking depressed. Lady Haigh cast a last glance around to see that all was right, and then, satisfied that the great room, with its fretted ceiling and walls inlaid with mirrors set in beautiful mosaic of many-coloured marbles and gilded arabesque work, was looking its best, took her place beside Sir Dugald with a sigh of complacency. The guests soon began to arrive in

their most imposing attire, and the assembly became a miniature court. It was not so difficult as usual, Cecil thought, to realise that one was in the city of the Khalifs, now that the splendours of the place were properly revealed by the aid of many wax-lights, and the rooms, at other times empty and silent, were gay with bright costumes and gorgeous Eastern draperies. But when the move into the dining-room was made, the illusion was spoilt, for all was Anglo-Indian, and the punkah, useless to-night, and the silent Hindu servants, though they might at first seem to give an air of oriental stateliness to the proceedings, were after all as alien to the old Baghdad as to older Babylon. Cecil felt honestly grieved by the innovations years had brought, and she had ample time to lament over them, for her neighbour at the table was a stout and bald-headed elderly merchant, who devoted himself to curry and other red-hot compounds with a singleness of purpose which left him no opportunity for conversation. Opposite to her Charlie was doing the agreeable to the wife of the American Consul, a faded but still vivacious lady, who was talking shrilly of Boston. The few Americans in Baghdad had united with their English kinsfolk to-night in celebrating the old home festival, and the English would fraternise with them in like manner when Thanksgiving Day came round.

The meal was a long one, for all the usual Christmas fare was *de rigueur*, as were the orthodox Christmas customs, while there were a number of toasts to be drunk at the close; but it was over at last, and the gentlemen were not long in following the ladies into the drawing-room. A number of other people who had only been invited to the reception after the dinner-party now came dropping in, and Cecil found herself

seized upon by her friend Mrs Hagopidan, the lady in whose defence she had broken a lance with Charlie not long after her arrival in Baghdad. Myrta Hagopidan was a lively little person, an Armenian by race, a native of British India by birth, and an Englishwoman by aspiration. As schoolgirls she and Cecil had adored the same governess, the lady who had been Cecil's form-mistress at the South Central having gone to India to take charge of the Poonah High School, as has been already mentioned, and this bond of union drew them very close together, although Mrs Hagopidan was pleased to affect the ultra-smart in dress and conversation, and had a weakness for talking about her "frocks," for which, by the way, Worth was sometimes responsible. She came rustling up now in a magnificent and utterly indescribable costume of various shimmering hues, and demanded that Cecil should take her up to the roof to see the view.

"I've never seen the city by moonlight from here," she said, "and Captain Rossiter has been telling me that it's quite too awfully sweet. Take me up to the best place, for I daren't go roaming about Sir Dugald's house alone without his leave, and I'm much too frightened to ask for it. Put on a shawl or coat or something, for it's quite chilly."

And linking her arm in Cecil's, Mrs Hagopidan drew her into the cloakroom, whence she extracted a wonderful little wrap of her own, all iridescent brocade and ostrich feathers, and then waited while Cecil hunted for her white-and-gold cloak. Her little dark face looked so mischievous and arch and winning, framed in the folds of her hood, that Cecil kissed her there and then, at which Mrs Hagopidan laughed until all her ostrich-feathers nodded wildly.

"Don't!" she cried, pushing Cecil away. "I don't want to make any one jealous; I'm simply an amiable and kind-hearted friend. There! that's your cloak, isn't it? Put it on and come along."

They hurried up the steps together, Mrs Hagopidan continuing to talk incessantly, so that Cecil was nearly exhausted before they had reached the top, and was obliged to stop to laugh.

"Lazy thing!" cried her companion. "You are stopping too soon. Only two or three steps more, and I'm dying to see what is to be seen. Come on. Why, there's some one here!"

A dark figure confronted them as they reached the top of the stairs, and Cecil almost screamed, but she saw immediately who it was.

"Myrta, you wretch!" she cried, "you have brought me here on false pretences."

"Don't excite yourself, my dear," said Mrs Hagopidan, swiftly descending the stairs to the landing, and sitting down on the lowest step. "I said I was a kind and amiable friend, and I'm going to be. No one shall interrupt you, I promise, and if any one tries to pass, it will be over my body. Now, Dr Egerton, use your opportunity. Go over to the other side of the roof, and I shan't hear. You may count on me to keep a good look-out."

"I don't like being entrapped, Dr Egerton," said Cecil. "I think I will ask you to take me back to Lady Haigh."

"I don't think you will," said Charlie, quickly, "when you remember how long I have been waiting for this talk with you, and how hard it has been for me to get back here even now. I can trust you not to keep me longer in suspense. Whatever my fate is, at least you will let me know it at once."

This was reasonable enough, and Cecil could not withhold the appeal to her sense of fairness. She walked across to the other side of the roof, and sat down upon a wide parapet, looking at the shadowy garden beneath, and at the river beyond, its broad surface flecked with many wavering lights. Behind was the courtyard, partially illuminated by the beams from the lighted windows of the drawing-room, and farther still the town, with its winding, badly-lighted streets, and its osty minarets and palm-trees. The strains of music floated up to her, mingled with the more distant sounds of the city, but no human being was visible anywhere, and it seemed as if the world held only herself and Charlie. He was standing beside her, apparently finding some difficulty in framing what he wanted to say.

"I've longed to speak to you for years," he burst out at last, "and now that I have the opportunity I feel tempted to use it, because I know my speaking to you will all must seem to you such arrant cheek. I have thought about it pretty often in the last week, and on my word! I can't think of any conceivable earthly reason why you should marry me, except that I love you."

He stopped, and then went on somewhat more slowly.

"Cousin Elma has told you how I wanted to speak to you two years ago, and why I didn't. That's the reason, Cecil. It was because I loved you, and I didn't want to get you into trouble, and I have learned to love you more and more since. I do love you, dear, and I've tried to be a better man for your sake. I can't talk much about that sort of thing, you know, but I do see things more in the way you do than when we first met. But I can't say it as I should like," he broke off

despairingly. "Whatever I say seems only to show me more and more how utterly presumptuous I am. I know I could never hope that you could care for me as I care for you, because I am such a wretched failure of a fellow, but if you could love me just a little—if you could take me on—well, just as a sort of pupil, you know—but I don't mean that at all. Will you marry me, Cecil?"

"And if I say no?" asked Cecil, looking away over the river.

"Now you are trying me, to see what I shall say," he said. "You know, if I said what I feel, it would be that I should throw up this place at once and go off into the desert with the Arabs; and I know that what you would like me to say would be that I should go on here working steadily, as if nothing had happened. Well, dear, I will try, but it will be awfully hard."

Cecil was touched to the heart. "Oh, Charlie, my poor boy!" she cried, impulsively, and put her hands into his. He took them doubtfully, not daring to accept the happy omen the action suggested.

"Cecil, is it really—do you mean yes?" he asked, with bated breath.

"Yes, I do," said Cecil, hurriedly. "I have been a horrid, calculating, conceited wretch. I've looked down on you, and laughed at you, and never thought how much better you were than I was all the time. I wish I was more worthy of you, Charlie."

"You? of me?" he asked. "Cecil, dear, don't laugh at me now. You really mean that you can love me? I don't want you to marry me out of pity, or anything that would make you unhappy. I can stand anything rather than that."

"But I do mean yes," murmured Cecil, brokenly.

"But you are crying," he said, with a man's usual tact in such matters.

"I'm not," said Cecil, indignantly. "Well, I suppose I'm homesick. No, it's not that. It's because I have been wanting you so much all this time, and you have come back at last."

"Please God, you shall never regret my coming back, dear," he said, gently, and drew her head down on his shoulder, where she cried bitterly, to her own great astonishment and his alarm. It was not at first that she could explain to him the mental conflict and strain of the past few months, but she was able to assure him that her tears did not spring from regret for the promise she had just given, and they sat there on the parapet talking for a long time. Engrossed in each other, they did not notice a long line of torch-bearers and horsemen approaching the Residency from the direction of the Palace, and they were struck with surprise when Mrs Hagopidan appeared suddenly at the top of the steps, and looking studiously the wrong way, cried in a thrilling whisper—

"Dr Egerton, you must go down at once. Azim Bey is at the door, and Sir Dugald was asking for you. If you don't put in an appearance, there'll be trouble. Do go at once."

"That abominable child!" cried Charlie, and obeyed.

CHAPTER XVI.

A MURDEROUS INTENT.

"WELL, dear?" cried Mrs Hagopidan, rushing to Cecil's side, as Charlie precipitated himself down the stairs, hurried across the courtyard, and arrived at the gate just in time to take his place behind Sir Dugald as the great doors were thrown open for Azim Bey's entrance, "is it all settled? You are glad now that I brought you here on false pretences? Do tell me, have you enjoyed the hour or so which you have spent in admiring the view?"

"Nonsense, Myrta; we haven't been there so long as that," said Cecil, half-vexed, but for all answer Mrs Hagopidan drew out a tiny gold watch and exhibited its face.

"It is undeniably an hour and a quarter since we left the drawing-room," she said, when Cecil, with an embarrassed laugh, had recognised the truth of her statement. "Now do tell me, dear, have you been finding out your fortune from the stars? I can tell you something. Your fate is connected with that of a dark man, and your happiness is threatened by a dark child, do you see? There's a separation somewhere, I am convinced, but of course a happy ending. Don't you think I tell fortunes beautifully?"

"Myrta," said Cecil, solemnly, "don't be silly. You know you can't find out things from the stars."

"How do you know? At least you will allow that I have had plenty of time this evening for studying them, haven't I?"

In the meantime Azim Bey had been received at the great gate of the Residency, and conducted with all due solemnity to a chair placed for him in the large drawing-room. When this had been accomplished, a sense of constraint seemed to fall upon the party assembled, together with a feeling of doubt as to what was to be done next. Music and conversation had both been interrupted by the unexpected arrival, and the intruder himself seemed as much at a loss as any one. He scrutinised attentively the faces of those present, bestowed a searching gaze on Charlie, and finally looked disappointed and a little inclined to yawn. It was not until Lady Haigh ventured on a civil inquiry as to the reason of this flattering and unlooked-for visit that he brightened up.

"I want mademoiselle," he answered, becoming animated at once. "Where is she? I came to fetch her. What have you done with her?" and he looked at Charlie again, in a puzzled and suspicious way.

Happily it was just at this moment that Cecil and Mrs Hagopidan returned to the room, the latter with her arm linked in Cecil's, and at the sight, Azim Bey's face beamed. He rose from his seat and walked, for his innate dignity forbade his running, to meet them.

"Oh, mademoiselle," he cried, "I am so lonely! There have never been two such long days since Baghdad was built. I am desolate without you. I have teased Aysha, I have had two of the servants beaten, I have been very bad. Now come back."

"Not yet, Bey," said Cecil, somewhat vexed, and yet touched by the eagerness of the little fellow's tone; "I can't break up Lady Haigh's party in the middle of the evening. But you would like to stay, wouldn't you, and see how we keep Christmas in England? You have often asked me about it, you know."

"And if Lady Haigh doesn't mind, we will play some of the old Christmas games," put in Charlie, who was very much vexed, and not at all touched, but wanted to make the best of the matter.

"*You* may play at Christmas games, M. le docteur, if you like," responded Azim Bey, fixing a stony gaze on Charlie, "but mademoiselle shall sit by me and explain them all. She shall not play your forfeits, your kissing under the mistletoe, with you."

"I never suggested that she should—in public, at any rate," returned Charlie, almost overcome by the idea of his kissing Cecil under the mistletoe for Azim Bey's edification. "I suppose you think that such a proceeding would need a good deal of explanation, Bey?"

"Madame," said Azim Bey to Lady Haigh, turning in disgust from Charlie's flippancy, "may I ask that you will have the kindness to let a chair be brought for mademoiselle, that she may sit beside me?"

"Bey! Lady Haigh is standing. I cannot sit down until she does," said Cecil, and her pupil groaned, and requested that a chair might be placed for Lady Haigh on the other side of him. Then, with Charlie as master of the revels, the games began. Urged by an agonised whisper from their leader, "For goodness' sake, you fellows, let us send this child home in a good temper," the other young men threw themselves nobly into the fray, and did their best to induct the bewildered Greek and Armenian guests into the mysteries of blindman's-

cuff and general post. Meanwhile, Azim Bey sat very upright on his chair, demanding from Cecil copious explanations of all that he witnessed, and criticising the players liberally. Mrs Hagopidan he was at first inclined to admire, but when he found that she was Cecil's friend he became jealous, and refused to have anything to say to her, at which the lively little lady laughed as an excellent joke. Except for this, however, Azim Bey seemed to enjoy the evening, if no one else did, for it accorded exactly with his tastes and his ideas of pleasure to sit still and look on while others supplied amusement for him. At length the games came to a close, and Lady Haigh carried off Cecil to don her Palace dress once more. When she came out of her room, with the great white sheet over her arm, ready to put on, Charlie was on the verandah waiting for her, and Lady Haigh discreetly returned into the room for something she had forgotten.

"I couldn't let you go without one more word," he said. "You must let me give you this, dear."

It was a curiously wrought ring, set with pearls and rubies in a quaint design, which produced the effect of two serpents twining round one another, and Charlie explained that he had bought it in Basra two years before. He did not mention that he had intended to offer it to her then, had not Lady Haigh's cruel fiat intervened, but Cecil understood what he did not say, and let him put it on her finger. But after a moment she started and took it off.

"I mustn't wear it yet, Charlie. You know that Azim Bey hasn't heard anything about our engagement, and I shall have to break it to him carefully. I shouldn't like him to find it out for himself, for it would hurt his feelings so dreadfully to think I hadn't

told him, and he would notice the ring at once and guess what it meant. I must choose a favourable time for telling him, and try to bring him round to take it pleasantly. I should be afraid he will be rather hard to persuade; he is so fond of me, you know."

"So am I," said Charlie, "and I don't see what that wretched child has to do with it. If only I could have got back yesterday, and saved you from three more years of slavery!"

"Don't be too sure you could have done it," said Cecil. "A duty is a duty, you know, and I have a duty to Azim Bey."

"And so you have to me. But I'm not going to be selfish, Cecil. You have made me happier to-night than I could ever have hoped or deserved to be, and if I couldn't wait ten years for you, if it was necessary, I should be a fool and a brute. Besides, after going through the last two years I know how to be thankful for what I have got. You don't know how bad I felt when any of the other fellows spoke to you."

"Did you?" said Cecil. "Do you know, I should have thought you had taken good care that they shouldn't have the chance."

"What! have I been such a dog in the manger as all that?" cried Charlie, aghast. "Did I worry you, Cecil? But still you let me do it."

"You see, I took an interest in you," said Cecil, calmly. "Lady Haigh commended you to my care in a sort of way."

"Lady Haigh is reluctantly compelled to ask you what time of night you imagine it to be, good people," said a voice from within the room, and the two on the verandah started guiltily.

"She's just ready, Cousin Elma," said Charlie, taking the sheet from Cecil's arm, and offering to help her put it on. But he was not an expert lady's-maid, and the process took a considerable time—still, even if his face did approach hers more nearly than was absolutely necessary, they were standing in deep shadow, and there was nobody to see.

And Cecil was duly mounted on her donkey, and escorted to the gate by Sir Dugald, and rode back to the Palace with Azim Bey at her side, feeling that she did not dare to look at him lest her eyes should tell their own happy story. For once she felt thankful for the protection of the veil, and drew it closely over her flushed face, wondering that the boy's glances did not penetrate even this defence.

At the Residency, meanwhile, Charlie was pouring out his tale to Lady Haigh, assuring her incoherently that he was at once the happiest and the least deserving man in the whole world, his cousin alternately corroborating and contradicting him. When she had heard all he had to tell, Lady Haigh went away to the office where Sir Dugald was sitting alone, immersed once more in his daily work after the frivolity of the evening, and reading a despatch which had just arrived by special courier. He looked up with puckered brow as his wife came softly in.

"I am overwhelmed with business, Elma," he said, as a gentle hint to her to be brief.

"I know, dear; I won't keep you," she replied, ruthlessly demolishing the barricade of reports and despatch-boxes with which he had fortified himself, and settling herself where she could see his face, "though I'm sure you had better leave it now and get a good night's rest. You would be much fresher in the morning. But that

wasn't what I came to tell you. Cecil and Charlie are engaged."

"Pair of fools!" said Sir Dugald, with his eyes on the despatch.

"Dugald!" cried Lady Haigh, with deep reproach in her tones. "I think they are made for one another."

"I think they are made to create trouble for other people," said Sir Dugald. "Now, Elma, I have always regarded you as the most sensible woman of my acquaintance. Look at the matter in a sensible light, and don't talk cant. Can you honestly tell me that you don't think Miss Anstruther, with her position and capabilities, a fool for throwing herself away on a man like the doctor?"

"He is a dear good fellow," said Lady Haigh, warmly.

"No doubt, but that's all you can say for him. And look at him. He has just settled down well here, and then he goes and unsettles himself by this engagement, which is pretty sure to get him into trouble at the Palace. Of course it need not, but with his genius for getting into hot water you may be sure it will."

"But would you have had them wait three years more?" asked Lady Haigh.

"Certainly not. It is preposterous that he should think of her at all. I should have some respect for Miss Anstruther's judgment if she had chosen Rossiter. He is a fine fellow, if you like, with some chances of success, and she could have had him for the trouble of holding up a finger."

"But would you have had her hold up a finger to Captain Rossiter when she was in love with Charlie?" inquired Lady Haigh.

"My dear Elma, I don't think you quite see my

int," said Sir Dugald, with exceeding mildness. "I consider that it shows a lack of good sense in Miss Struther to have fallen in love, as you phrase it, with your cousin at all. To see a girl throwing away her chances is a thing I detest. And now I really must prepare the draft of the answer to this despatch." At this time Lady Haigh accepted her dismissal, and, tired, a little saddened, but by no means concerned.

All unconscious of the unpalatable criticism her engagement had excited, Cecil rose the next morning prepared to take the first favourable opportunity of speaking the news to her pupil; but she was somewhat startled when he himself, in the midst of his lessons, paved the way for the disclosure.

"Mademoiselle," he said, suddenly, looking up from the essay he was writing on the character of Peter the Great, "what makes you so happy?"

"Am I any happier than usual, Bey?" asked Cecil, with a start and a blush. Her pupil studied her face seriously and deliberately.

"Yes, mademoiselle, I am sure of it. When we were out in the garden an hour ago, you walked as though you wished to dance, and you were all the time singing tunes in a whisper, and just now you sat like this, and looked at the wall and smiled," and Azim Bey supported his chin upon one hand, and pursed up his lemn little face into a ludicrous imitation of Cecil's far-away gaze and the smile that had accompanied it.

"Dear me, Bey, how closely you watch me!" said Cecil, uncomfortably, feeling that she was not carrying out her determination of the night before at all in the proper way. "I am afraid you have not been working very hard. How far have you got with Peter?"

"I have finished all but his influence upon the Greek Church, mademoiselle. You looked so happy that I felt I must stop to ask you about it. But I will finish Peter, and then we can have some more talk."

"Don't you think I ought to be happy to be back here after being away for two whole days?" asked Cecil, lightly, trying to turn aside the subject with a laugh; but Azim Bey bent upon her a severe gaze from under his black brows, and answered solemnly—

"No, mademoiselle; for I watched your face when you went away, and it was not sad. I am convinced that your happiness has nothing to do with me. Now I will finish my essay."

And having succeeded in making his governess uncomfortable, he applied himself once more to his writing, feeling, no doubt, a certain satisfaction in seeing that she was beginning to look worried and anxious instead of happy. She knew him well in these impracticable moods, when he would exhibit an impish power of detecting the things which he was not meant to see, and delighted in sweeping away conventional disguises, and she feared that he suspected what had taken place, and meant to make her task of telling him about it as difficult as he could. He finished his essay in due time, fastened the pages neatly together, and presented the roll to her with a polite bow, then tidied and closed his desk, all in grim silence, while Cecil waited expectantly for what he would say next. For the moment he seemed to have forgotten the matter, however, for he called to the servants to spread a carpet for him beside the brazier, and to bring some cushions for mademoiselle, and also to replenish the glowing charcoal, for it was a cold day for Baghdad. When his orders had been carried out, he turned to Cecil, and invited her to come

Down from her desk, and to sit by the brazier a little and warm herself. Pupil and governess generally took a short rest of this kind in the middle of the morning, and Cecil was wont to regard it as a very pleasant time, when bits from the latest magazines and papers which had reached her might be read and discussed, and Azim Bey's critical faculty guided in the right direction.

"Captain Rossiter lent me a new magazine yesterday, which had just been sent him from home," she said, willing to delay her important communication until her pupil was in a more accommodating mood, "and I think you would like to see it, Bey. I will send Um Yusuf for it, if you like."

"Thank you, mademoiselle, but I think I had rather talk to-day instead of reading," replied Azim Bey; and as Cecil took her seat upon the cushions, he sat down upon his carpet on the other side of the brazier and looked at her. He had proposed to talk, but the conversation did not seem to be forthcoming; he only sat still, with his great black eyes fixed upon his governess. Cecil grew nervous, and perceived that she had not succeeded in diverting his mind from the former subject after all. It was foolish to feel perturbed merely on account of this, however, and she resolved to seize the opportunity and say what she had intended.

"You asked me just now why I seemed so happy, Bey, and I will tell you. I am very happy, though I did not know I was showing it so plainly. You have read in books about people's being engaged?"

"Yes, mademoiselle," responded her pupil.

"Well, how would you like it if I told you that I was engaged?"

"I should be deeply interested, mademoiselle," he replied, with cold politeness. Cecil sighed. He was

evidently determined not to be sympathetic. She must try and begin on another tack.

"You like me to be happy, don't you, Bey? Supposing that there was a very good, nice man whom I liked very much, and who—well, who thought he liked me very much, and that he wanted me to be engaged to him, and there was no reason why we should not be engaged, what then?"

"And as to yourself, mademoiselle?"

"Oh, supposing of course that I was willing," said Cecil, hastily; "I said that. It wouldn't make any difference to you, you know. I should stay with you for the three years more, exactly as I promised, and only go when you didn't want me any longer. Well, Bey, supposing that all this were to happen, there would be no reason why you should mind, would there? I don't see how it would affect you at all."

"I should have him killed," observed Azim Bey, calmly.

"Have whom killed?" demanded Cecil, somewhat startled.

"That man, mademoiselle,—that wicked, wretched man! I would give all I had to get him killed."

"Nonsense, Bey! We are not in the 'Arabian Nights' now."

"No, mademoiselle, but we are in Baghdad."

"I shouldn't have thought you were so silly, Bey. Why should he be killed? He would have done you no harm."

"He would, indeed, mademoiselle. You are my own mademoiselle, and you shall not be thinking of this—this *imaginary* person. If he comes, I will have him killed."

"I thought you cared a little for me, Bey, now that we have been two years together," said Cecil, with deep reproach. "And yet you talk like this of having an innocent person whom I loved killed, just because I loved him and he loved me."

"But that is the very reason, mademoiselle. You would marry him and go away to your England again, and I want you to stay here in Baghdad, and be always ready when I want to ask you things. When I am married, I shall say to Safieh Khanum, 'If you wish to please me, ask Mdle. Antaza's advice about everything, and you are sure to be right.' So you see, mademoiselle, I shall always want you, and you must not go away. Why, I heard Mas'ud telling you how rude I was to him yesterday, and how I teased Ayesha and Basmeh Kalfa just because you were away."

"But I can't stay with you always," said Cecil, vexed, and yet half-laughing at the tone of pride in which he spoke, "so we must hope you will improve before I leave you. If I never married at all, I should go home when my five years here were over. When you are married, Safieh Khanum will know very well how to manage things without my advice. Don't you see that it wouldn't do at all for me to be interfering in her household affairs? Besides, Bey, think how selfish you are. You would like me to lose the very thing that is making me so happy just now, because you would have to do without me."

"If any one comes, and wishes to be engaged to you, mademoiselle, I shall have him killed," repeated Azim Bey, doggedly. Cecil lost her temper.

"Very well, Bey; if you are going to behave so foolishly, and talk so childishly of what you know

nothing about, I am not going to tell you anything more. You may find things out for yourself, if you like."

And Cecil walked away to her own room, and returned with Charlie's ring shining on her finger, a perpetual defiance and reminder to Azim Bey.

CHAPTER XVII.

AN IDYLL, AND ITS ENDING.

all, the tender care Cecil had shown for her feelings, almost disregarding Charlie's in common with them, was not only without result, but unnecessary. Azim Bey had read in her face said good-night what had happened, and neither nor denials on her part would have had the effect in shaking his belief in his discovery. Her vain attempts to mollify him were met with contempt as signs of conscious guilt, the rupture which concluded them only increased the enmity against Charlie, over whom he had now been obliged to quarrel with mademoiselle. He was obliged to take his lessons as usual, but at other times he sat alone and meditated vengeance.

His mind was full of schemes — indeed the only check was their number and variety. He intended to get rid of Charlie, and to punish Cecil for giving herself to him; but as soon as he had settled the means of doing this, a new and splendid idea came into his head, and he would devote himself to working it out until it in its turn was superseded by a better. There was another difficulty

common to all these plans. It seemed absolutely impossible to carry them out, situated as he was, under Cecil's charge and Mastd's guardianship. Even when he had patched up a hollow peace with Cecil, cemented by a mutual understanding that the subject of her engagement was not to be mentioned between them, this difficulty confronted him still, and it was therefore with a joy born of hope and confidence that he found M. Karalampi one day in the Pasha's anteroom. Here was the man who could do what he wanted, and M. Karalampi was astonished to find himself seized upon and dragged into a corner, and adjured in excited whispers to get rid of that wretch, that criminal of an English doctor who had dared to engage himself to Mdle. Antaza.

M. Karalampi's first feeling, which he was careful to conceal, was one of helpless bewilderment, but of this Azim Bey had no idea. To him, the Greek, backed up by all the help he could easily command, was a *deus ex machina* who could accomplish his purpose in the twinkling of an eye. M. Karalampi knew better the difficulties of the situation. Murder was out of the question, and so was kidnapping. Either, or an attempt at either, would set the Balio Bey and all the English on the alert, and lead to the discovery of the instigator of the deed, and M. Karalampi was not at all inclined to compromise his position, either with the Pasha or with the foreign consuls, for the sake of Azim Bey. No; whatever was to be done must be done by careful diplomacy and working underground, and for this time would be necessary. But to say so to Azim Bey would mean that the boy would fly off at a tangent to some other person who might be inclined to help him, and this

M. Karalampi could not allow. Almost simultaneously two plans formed themselves in his brain, one for getting rid of Charlie, the other for gaining time from Azim Bey, and he put the second into execution at once. Lowering his voice mysteriously, and entreating pardon for casting a doubt on the correctness of the Bey Effendi's information, he ventured to inquire whether he were absolutely certain that it was Dr Egerton to whom mademoiselle was engaged? The doctor and she had not seen one another for a long time before Christmas, whereas Captain Rossiter was at the Residency all the time. It was known that the Balio Bey thought very highly of him, and it was whispered that he himself thought very highly of mademoiselle: indeed M. Karalampi had heard it said that he was going to marry her. Was Azim Bey sure that it was not Captain Rossiter to whom she was engaged? Of course M. Karalampi could not guarantee the authenticity of his own information, but it would certainly be very annoying to get rid of the wrong man and find the evil untouched.

M. Karalampi knew very well the falsity of the suggestion he offered, but it served his present purpose admirably. Azim Bey was struck dumb. He beat his brains to try and find out why he had fixed upon Charlie as the happy man, for he had certainly never been told that he was; but he could find nothing but that early incursion into the harem, and the little scene he had witnessed at the Residency on the day of the riot, to justify his suspicions. Meanwhile, as M. Karalampi pointed out respectfully, these were only proofs that Dr Egerton was in love with mademoiselle, which no one had ever doubted, while it was undeniable that Captain Rossiter had rushed to her

rescue with the utmost eagerness when he heard she was in danger. Azim Bey felt nonplussed. He could only promise that he would do his best to discover the truth—he must be able to do so without much difficulty—and adjure his fellow-conspirator to be in readiness to act the moment he let him know who was to be assailed.

They parted, and Azim Bey set himself to his task, but it was more difficult than he had imagined it would be. Cecil's lips were sealed, at any rate to him, on the subject of her engagement. If he attempted to approach it, she froze instantly, and he could not obtain from her the slightest clue to the mystery, while all his efforts to pump Um Yusuf found her as impenetrable as the grave. It so happened that for a considerable time he met no one who had sufficient interest in or knowledge of the matter to enlighten him. He felt convinced that he could have got the truth out of either Charlie or Captain Rossiter by means of a few questions, but neither of them came in his way, and though he saw Sir Dugald once or twice, the Bahi Bey was not the kind of person to approach on such a quest. Much time was consumed in these delays, and winter had passed, and spring was over all the plains before the boy's curiosity could be gratified.

It was just at the time when the fruit-trees were in bloom, and the watered gardens around Baghdad miles of loveliness, that it entered Lady Haigh's head to give a picnic. Some miles down the Tigris were the ruins of an ancient fort, situated on a bold bluff overhanging the stream, and surrounded by fruit-gardens, in one of which was a flimsy summer-palace built of wood, and almost in decay. The spot was noted for its fruit-trees, which were supposed to flourish

sh on the site of an ancient battle-field, and Sir Dugald was accustomed to rent the place every spring and summer as a refuge from the heat and miasma of Baghdad. There was plenty of shooting to be had on the neighbouring plains, and good fishing for any one that cared for it, so that a week or two at the summer-villa was a coveted treat to the staff at the Consulate. It was not yet time for the great heat which makes the city almost unbearable, but the fruit-blossom was particularly lovely this year, and Lady Haigh was fired with the desire to display Takht-Iskandar in all its beauty. She could not have all her friends out to stay with her, especially since the habitable part of the house was now exceedingly limited in extent, but she could at any rate give them a sight of the place, and therefore she sent out invitations for a picnic.

Of course Cecil and Azim Bey were invited. The latter, who was deputed by his father to represent him on the occasion, accepted the charge with huge delight, and kept his attendants hard at work for days beforehand in bringing all his equipments to the highest pitch of perfection. He felt that he was about to perform a public function, and his youthful heart beat high with pride. Cecil's heart beat high also, but not with pride. She would see Charlie—nay, she would certainly, if Lady Haigh could compass it, get one of those long talks with him which were now a distinguishing delight of Sunday evenings at the Residency. In this hope she put on, under her great white sheet, the newest and prettiest dress she had, one which had just been sent out to her from England, and succeeded in mounting her donkey safely in the unwonted garb. The party from the Residency and most of their guests went down the river to Takht-

Iskandar in a steam-launch, but the Pasha preferred the land journey for his son, and thus Cecil and Azim Bey jogged along soberly on donkey-back, followed by a motley group of servants, and preceded by a running groom.

The way was very pleasant, lying as it did across the wide plains of Mesopotamia, now gay with their brief verdure and studded with flowers of every hue. The start was made as soon as it was light, so that it was still quite early in the day when the frowning ruins which the Arabs called Alexander's Throne came into view. Sir Dugald advanced to the gate of the garden to welcome his guests, and Lady Haigh met them at the edge of the great terrace of masonry, with its tanks and fountains, which supplied a site for the picnic in place of the non-existent grass-plot. Here tents had been pitched and carpets spread in the shade of the trees, and everything seemed to promise ease and rest. Azim Bey gave his arm to his hostess to conduct her to her seat, an honour which reflected much glory, but some inconvenience, on Lady Haigh, who was much taller than her youthful cavalier. Sir Dugald followed with Cecil, her pupil looking round sharply to make sure that she had not wandered away in more congenial society. Arrived at the encampment under the trees, the party reclined on gorgeous rugs and listened to the voices and instruments of a band of native musicians, refreshing themselves with sherbet the while. This style of entertainment was quite to the taste of the orientals among the guests, and the Europeans had learnt by long experience to tolerate it with apparent resignation, so that the time passed in great contentment. As for Cecil, she leaned back on her cushions and enjoyed the colour contrast

ordered by the gay hues of the carpets relieved against the yellow of the stonework and the dark shade of the trees, and by the twisting and crossing of the blossomy boughs against the blue of the sky, and wondered where Charlie could be.

After some time the calm of the party was broken by the arrival of a juggler, a most marvellous Hindoo, such a one as Azim Bey had often read of but had never seen, and the luxurious guests raised themselves and moved a little closer, so as to be able to see his tricks more easily. This left Cecil rather on the outskirts of the group, and before she could rise to go another voice said in her ear—

“Come and see the ruins.”

With one glance at Azim Bey, deeply absorbed in the juggler's tricks, under Lady Haigh's guardianship, Cecil was up in a moment, scarcely needing the help of Charlie's hand, and he hurried her round the nearest path and into the wood. There were no footpaths, but they hastened, laughing guiltily, like two children playing truant, along the banks of earth left between the numerous little canals by which each row of trees was irrigated, and finally came out on a grassy knoll; with pomegranate-trees, which were now gay with white blossom.

“Now we're safe,” said Charlie. “We can take it easy. Do you see where you are? There are the ruins just in front.”

No one, as it happened, had observed Charlie's sudden appearance and their flight. Even Lady Haigh, with heroic self-restraint, kept her eyes fixed on the juggler, lest she should by looking round attract attention to the pair, and the performance went on. When it was over, Lady Haigh invited Azim Bey

to come and see a small plantation of English fruit-trees, belonging to several choice varieties, which Sir Dugald had lately imported. He complied with her request, but in the one glance around which he took before accompanying her, he had perceived and realised the fact that his governess had disappeared. His face showed, however, no trace of his having made this discovery. He escorted Lady Haigh from place to place, asked intelligent questions about the foreign trees, promised to recommend his father to try planting some, and kept his eyes open all the time for some trace of the truant. His manner was so natural, he seemed so deeply interested, that Lady Haigh was completely deceived; nay, more, the very thought of the need there was for watchfulness slipped from her mind, and when they returned to the rest of the guests, she entered into conversation with Denarien Bey, who was among them. Azim Bey saw and seized his opportunity. He removed his hand softly from Lady Haigh's arm, and sheltered by her capacious person from the observation of Sir Dugald and Captain Rossitter, edged his way out just as Cecil and Charlie had done, until, when fairly hidden by the tent, he ran off at full speed in the direction of the clue he had discovered as he returned with his hostess from the plantation. It was a little strip of flimsy white stuff, which he had noticed clinging to the rough bark of a gnarled old apple-tree—only that, but he knew it to be a piece of the muslin veil Cecil was wearing, and it showed that she must have passed that way. Azim Bey followed the path she and Charlie had taken through the wood, and came out as they had done on the knoll where the pomegranate-trees grew; but here he was at a loss, for those whom he sought were not visible, and Cecil had not been so

considerate as to leave another clue for his guidance. He went some time fruitlessly in following paths that led where, and in losing himself among the trees and the little canals, but at last he came upon an ascending creek leading through a dense thicket of fruit-trees and bushes. As he went on he heard the sound of voices, and he crept cautiously nearer, keeping in the shadow of the bushes, until he was able to see what filled him with rage and longings for vengeance, and made him swear the blackest oaths he could think of in any language.

And yet the picture before him was not an unpleasing one. In the heart of the thicket was a space clear of bushes, but occupied by the ruins of one of the ancient towers of the fortress, partly overgrown with ivy. On a mass of fallen masonry sat Cecil in her evening dress, her veil thrown back. Above her were arched boughs of apple and apricot, covered with blossom, and the thin smooth rods of the almond-tree, with their pink and blush-coloured blossoms interspersed with tiny fresh green leaves. The branches bent and swayed in the light breeze, and swept her hair softly, and every wind scattered over her a shower of pink and white petals. But she was not studying the beauties of nature now. Her cheeks were flushed, her lips parted, her eyelids drooping, and beside her sat Charlie Egerton, holding both her hands in his, his eyes passionately devouring her face. They were not talking. It was a moment of supreme content, such as they had not enjoyed for months, and they were too happy to speak. The unseen spectator perceived it all, and gnashed his teeth with rage. Poor little Azim Bey! He knelt there, taking in every detail of the scene before him, and cursing one,

at least, of the actors in it very heartily. If a loaded pistol had been put into his hand Charlie might have fared ill, but even Azim Bey did not feel impelled to test his dagger upon him before Cecil's eyes. Therefore he only remained where he was, peering through the bushes, and listening eagerly when some chance sound disturbed the pair and they began to talk. Their talk filled him with amazement. It was by no means particularly deep, and it was undeniably disjointed; but the listener carried away with him ideas of love which differed widely both from those inculcated in his French novels and those engendered in his precocious little mind by the sensuous atmosphere of the harem in which he had been brought up. It gave him his first glimpse of the gulf which remained fixed between the most thoroughly Europeanised Turk and even an orientalised Englishman, who, with all his faults and follies, was still the heir of centuries of knightly training and Christian influence. Naimeh Khanum would have rejoiced if she could have known the thoughts which passed through her young brother's mind in that half hour, for she would have hoped that the realisation of the underlying difference would lead him to make efforts to eradicate it altogether. But Azim Bey differed in many respects from his sister. His nature, like those of the men of his nation of whom she had spoken, was inclined to be satisfied with external resemblance to Europeans, and the discovery of the real unlikeness only made him hate all the more the individual through whom it was brought home to him.

"I really must go back to Lady Haigh now," said Cecil, at last. "Azim Bey will begin to suspect something."

Charlie's reply was a remark not complimentary to Azim Bey.

"And I haven't seen you really since Christmas," he went on—"not properly, I mean. You keep me alive on very little crumbs of hope, Cecil, and when the time comes for fulfilment you just give me some more crumbs. I did think I should get a good talk with you to-day, but I haven't told you anything of all that I wanted to say. Now don't tell me I can say it next Sunday, for you know we get scarcely any time together then."

"Poor boy! why don't you talk faster, and get more into the time?" laughed Cecil, rising from her seat, and sending a little shower of petals falling as the flower-laden boughs brushed her head. "I am sure you have wasted a good deal of time to-day."

"Because I wanted to look at you, and not to talk," said Charlie, and they both laughed, much to Azim Bey's disgust. Then Cecil's veil caught in something as she rearranged it (it was a most inconvenient garment that veil, continually catching in things), and Charlie had to disentangle it—a lengthy process, which made the onlooker more angry still. Charlie caught Cecil's hand in his once and kissed it, and Azim Bey made bitter remarks in his own mind on the foolishness of lovers.

"We must come," said Cecil again. "Just think how very embarrassing it would be if Azim Bey took it into his head to come and look for me."

"I don't care," said Charlie. "What does he signify?"

"I don't think you would be able to get much talk if he was here listening to every word," said Cecil. "Now, Charlie, please don't, *please!* I have just made myself tidy, and I must get my gloves on."

"I'll put them on for you," said Charlie, kindly, but the offer was declined with thanks. The pair passed out of the little cleared spot in the woods, so close to Azim Bey that Cecil's dress almost brushed him as she went by, and when they were out of sight he rose and made a circuit through the grounds, so as to come upon the picnic-party from an opposite direction. Lady Haigh had discovered her charge's absence by this time, and was in dire dismay about him; but his appearance and his unruffled demeanour reassured her, for she could not guess that his heart was so full of rage and fury that he could scarcely bring himself to speak civilly to any one. It was a triumph of oriental dissimulation which enabled him to keep cool, and no one ever suspected that he had done more than search the grounds for Cecil and had not found her. The rest of the day passed calmly enough, and Azim Bey kept close to Cecil's side, and conversed graciously, and behaved like a civilised and well-brought-up young gentleman, while all the time he was planning vengeance in his mind.

The sun began to approach the horizon at last, and the party, hosts and guests alike, prepared to return to the city. Torches were lighted, the tents hastily taken down and rolled up with the carpets, and while these were being taken on board the steam-launch the donkeys belonging to the Palace party were brought round. Azim Bey was in a great hurry to start, being anxious to prevent long leave-takings. He mounted quickly, although this process was usually a lengthy and dignified one, and waited impatiently for Cecil. So impatient was he that he started before she was properly mounted, and she would have fallen had not Charlie caught her in his arms. Boiling over with

rage, Charlie gave her into Lady Haigh's care, and confronted Azim Bey, who had returned in some alarm.

"You did that on purpose, you little rascal!" cried Charlie, seizing the boy's rein. Azim Bey's face became pale with rage.

"You dare, monsieur? You venture to say that I desired to hurt mademoiselle? Go, you are a pig, a serpent—I despise you! Go, I say!" and he lifted his riding-whip, which Charlie immediately grasped.

"Don't try that sort of thing on with me, young one," he cried. "You'd better not, or I may be tempted to give you a thrashing, which would do you a lot of good."

"How, monsieur, you threaten me?" screamed Azim Bey. "I will remember it, I will remember it well! You and I will meet, and you also shall remember this. Go, dog of an Englishman!" with a vigorous tug at the whip, to which Charlie gave a wrench that broke it between them. Azim Bey flung the fragments in his face, with a torrent of curses.

"Egerton!" said Sir Dugald, stepping between them, "what is the meaning of this?"

"He has insulted me, monsieur," cried Azim Bey, trembling with passion. Sir Dugald cast a scathing glance at Charlie.

"I am sure Dr Egerton is willing to apologise if he has inadvertently said anything to offend you, Bey," he said. "Egerton, you must certainly see that there is no other course open to you. It is impossible that you could have intended to insult the Bey."

"He shall apologise for it—in blood," growled Azim Bey, ferociously, while Charlie stood silent, nettled by Sir Dugald's authoritative tone. "He said I meant to

hurt mademoiselle. The rest is for him and me to settle alone."

"Oh, Charlie," said Cecil, coming up with anxious eyes, "you did not mean that, I'm sure. You must have known that the Bey would never think of such a thing. You will apologise, won't you? You really ought."

"As you say I ought, I will," said Charlie, turning from the whispered colloquy with a defiant glance at Azim Bey and Sir Dugald. "I regret, Bey, to have wounded your feelings by a hasty accusation which was not justified by facts. I can't say more than that."

"If you have done enough mischief, Egerton, perhaps you will rejoin the rest of the party," said Sir Dugald, in a low voice. "Allow me to assist you to mount, Miss Anstruther."

Cecil complied in silence, feeling ready to hate Sir Dugald for his treatment of Charlie, and yet conscious that he had much to try him. Diplomatic complications had arisen out of incidents no more important than this one, and it was hard for her Majesty's Consul-General to find his best-laid plans endangered by the imprudence of a hot-headed fool in love. And therefore he did his best to pacify Azim Bey, and succeeded so well that the boy talked quite graciously to Cecil as they rode back to the city over the short grass, lighted by the flaring torches of their escort.

CHAPTER XVIII.

GATHERING CLOUDS.

AZIM BEY was now all eagerness to communicate to his trusted ally M. Karalampi the discovery he had made, which proved that he had been right all along in fixing upon Charlie as the person whose removal was necessary. But, as it happened, he did not succeed in meeting him until some days after the picnic, and by this time the boy's anxiety to get rid of Dr Egerton had risen almost to fever-heat. M. Karalampi was able to pacify him by assuring him that now that the most important point was settled, Charlie should quit Baghdad within a month—a promise which seemed impossible of fulfilment to Azim Bey, who did not know that his agent had been secretly at work ever since his services had been first engaged. He worked with extreme art and delicacy, conveying to those he wished to influence slight intimations which seemed nothing when taken alone, but which became dangerous indeed when looked at in unison. At first he laboured chiefly to influence the Pasha. Ahmed Khémi had hitherto known very little respecting the doctor of the British Consulate, but for the space of about a month M. Karalampi dinned his name into his patron's ears in season and out of

season. Dr Egerton was a most dangerous man. He was accustomed to disguise himself and go among the people, deceiving even true believers. He was a spy, it was difficult to determine in whose pay, but indubitably a spy. He intrigued with the Armenians, the Jews, the Persians, the missionaries, the Russians, the Greeks. The Balio Bey did not like him, but was forced to tolerate him, knowing, no doubt, that he was employed by persons very high in authority. And so on, and so on, until the harassed Pasha, bewildered by the number and inconsistency of the charges, peremptorily ordered his too zealous agent never to mention the name of that English doctor to him again, on pain of his serious displeasure.

This was just what M. Karalampi had intended, and it closed the first act of the drama. He had gone upon the principle of throwing plenty of mud, and he was quite satisfied as to its powers of sticking, even though he himself had bowed respectfully and promised to obey his Excellency, averring that it was only zeal for the good of the Government that had made him so troublesome. His own work was over for the present, and it was the turn of his confederates. Each of them had only one thing to do, but they were all to be counted upon to do it. At some time or other, in the Pasha's hearing, they were to throw a doubt on Dr Egerton's honesty, hint at double-dealing on his part, or remark that he had been seen in company with suspected persons. To the last accusation Charlie's inveterate habit of picking up disreputable acquaintances lent a good deal of colour, and this helped to establish the rest. The Pasha was staggered at last. He had silenced Karalampi, but here were all these independent witnesses giving him the very same warning. There must

be something in it, and it would be foolish to disregard the testimony of so many unbiassed persons. It might be that Providence was giving him notice of some plot laid against him, while he had been obstinately rejecting the warning. He made up his mind to look into things very carefully in future.

M. Karalampi perceived this, and chuckled as he made ready for the third act of the play. Although his lips were sealed at the Palace, he had not been silent in the city. Not that he ever spoke against the English doctor, nor could any rumours be traced to him,—the only thing certain was that Charlie Egerton had become desperately unpopular. The shopkeepers with whom he had been wont to exchange a passing word withdrew into the inmost recesses of their dwellings so as not to be obliged to speak to him; children fled from before him, or were snatched up by their mothers, in dreadful fear of the evil-eye. There was one small boy who had once been brought by a still smaller Armenian friend to the Residency, to be treated for a cut finger or some other childish trouble, and who had been much impressed by the well-filled shelves in the surgery. Hitherto it had always been his delight to meet his doctor in the street and salute him with the cry of "O father of bottles, peace be upon thee!" but now he crept guiltily into a corner and hid himself if he saw him coming. This was the hardest thing of all for Charlie to bear, even though the loungers at the coffee-houses, with whom he had been something of a favourite, crowded together and looked at him distrustfully as he passed, muttering "Spy!" in ominous voices. The old women in the bazaars, privileged by age and ugliness to have a voice in public, reviled him roundly

when they saw him, and then told each other in whispers that he was paid by foreign enemies to bring in new diseases and spread them in the city.

This change in public opinion perplexed Charlie extremely. At first he attributed it to another outburst of anti-English feeling, but this theory was dispelled on his learning from Captain Rossiter that no unpleasantness was displayed towards him. Then he set it down to some temporary crank or fancy of the people's, and thought little more about it until, when he went one evening to call on Isaac Azevedo, the old man told him plainly, though with many apologies, that his visits were a source of danger to the whole Jewish quarter, and asked him not to come again for the present. It was this which first opened his eyes to the possibility of the approach of something more than mere unpleasantness, but it was not really brought home to him until one day when he had been to tea at the Mission-house, and Dr Yehudi took him aside at parting, and asked him earnestly whether he still carried a revolver, and whether it was ready for use. The danger of the situation became clear to him then, and it was just about the same time that M. Karalampi decided that matters were ripe for the completion of his plan.

Of the steps which led to this end Cecil saw only the last, and she was made aware of it one Sunday, when she arrived at the Residency to find Charlie looking out for her, with a doleful and even shame-stricken visage. She cast uneasy glances at him every now and then during the morning, but the gloom did not lift, and she waited anxiously for the quiet afternoon-time when they were wont to exchange their confidences. As soon as they were together in a shady corner of the deserted drawing-room Charlie told his story.

"I've been an awful fool, Cecil, and got myself into a nice mess."

"Charlie! What do you mean?"

"It's perfectly true. You know that I was to dine at the Farajians' on Friday night? They are awfully nice people, and Farajian's brother Ephrem was to be there,—the man who has been travelling in the mountains and looking for ruined cities. He was educated by some American missionaries somewhere, and he has picked up an amazing knowledge of antiquities. Well, I went, and found that all the guests were Armenians except myself and Stavro Vogorides, that Greek fellow who hangs about at the Russian Consulate."

"I know. I have seen him with M. Karalampi," said Cecil.

"We talked very pleasantly all dinner-time," Charlie went on, "but at the end some one—I think it was Vogorides, but I can't be sure—started the subject of Armenia. We were all friends, of course, but it struck me even then as rather a risky thing to do among such excitable people. You know that there's no holding Armenians if you once get them on that subject, and one after another told stories of the most awful atrocities I ever heard. They made my blood run cold. I can't conceive how people who believe that such things have happened, and many of them to relations of their own, can ever speak civilly to a Turk again, or bear to be anywhere near him, except rifle in hand, and I said something of the kind. It seemed to set them off, for they all stood up and drank the toast of 'Free Armenia!' solemnly."

"And you drank it too? Oh, Charlie!" said Cecil, anxiously.

"That wasn't all," said Charlie, determined to free

his conscience completely, "for I said afterwards that I was sure if they ever did rise, English people would help them with arms and men and money, just as we did the Greeks in the War of Independence."

"Oh, Charlie!" groaned Cecil again, "how could you?"

"I don't know. I was carried out of myself, I suppose. Well, in some way or other, I can't imagine how, the thing has got to Sir Dugald's ears. He sent for me last night, and gave me such a wiggling! Of course I was a fool to say what I did, but he makes out that if the thing got known I should have to leave Baghdad at once. He said it was an unpardonable breach of diplomatic etiquette, an indiscretion he should have considered impossible. He said I ought to consider you, too, and not go imperilling my life and my prospects in the way I did. He also said a good deal more—in fact, I got it pretty hot."

"But what did he mean about imperilling your life?" asked Cecil, quickly.

"Oh, I didn't mean to say that, but perhaps after all you had better hear it from me; you won't be so much frightened. It may not have anything to do with it at all, but yesterday, when I was out riding with Rossiter on the other side of the river, a fellow potted at me with a long gun. It may have been only that he wanted something to shoot at, but the people round here do seem to have rather a prejudice against me just now. Anyhow, he missed, and we gave chase, but he got away."

"But who can have told Sir Dugald about the Farajians' dinner-party?" asked Cecil. "The servants?"

"There were none in the room at the time. No, he absolutely declined to tell me—said it was enough for me that he knew. I don't know who it could be."

"It may have been M. Vogorides," mused Cecil. "Charlie, have you ever made an enemy of him or of M. Karalampi?"

"Would you have me make a friend of either of them?" he inquired.

"Well, there is a kind of distant civility you might employ towards them."

"Not towards them, that is just it, any more than towards a snake, except with something between—bars or glass or something of that sort. I cannot stand these Levantines. There is something picturesque and romantic about a Jew, even if he does try to cheat you; and as for the Arabs and Turks, it makes you quite sorry to know the trouble they take to get the better of you, when you see through them all the time. But those Greeks, ugh!"

"That sounds as though you objected to them because they were clever enough to be able to cheat you," said Cecil. "But if this is the way you regard them, no doubt you have hurt M. Vogorides' feelings at some time or other, and he has tried to revenge himself on you by telling Sir Dugald. But do take care of yourself, Charlie. What should I do if anything happened to you?"

"I think you would do much better without me," broke out Charlie. "I see that I ought never to have asked you to marry me, Cecil, such a heedless fool as I am, and I also see that I ought to give you up now, instead of worrying you with my misfortunes. I really mean it."

"Happily, the decision doesn't lie with you," said Cecil. "Why, what a fair-weather friend you must think me, Charlie! Have I deserved it? Have I ever seemed worried by your misfortunes? I should have

thought I had felt them too much for such a word to be applicable."

"You are an angel," said Charlie, and kissed her.

"I have only this to say," went on Cecil, freeing herself. "You may give me up if you like, but I decline entirely to give you up. If you wish me to go through life in the ridiculous position of a girl engaged to a man who doesn't consider himself engaged to her, I must bear it, I suppose."

"You know I don't," said Charlie, and the conversation after this point became somewhat personal and lacking in coherence, until Charlie tore himself away to go and visit his patients. But Cecil was still anxious and uneasy, and at afternoon tea, finding that Charlie was still absent, she moved boldly across to Sir Dugald, determined to learn the worst.

"To what am I indebted for this unwonted honour?" was the question asked by Sir Dugald's eyebrows as he rose and gave her his chair, but in words he only inquired whether she found the spot shady enough.

"I wanted to speak to you about Dr Egerton," she said, breathlessly, too anxious about Charlie to answer his question politely. Sir Dugald's eyebrows went up.

"Would it be rude to say that I have already heard rather too much about Dr Egerton lately?" he asked.

"That was just the reason why I wanted to talk to you about him," said Cecil. "Were you in earnest in what you said to him last night?"

"I am not in the habit of playing practical jokes on officials of this Consulate," said Sir Dugald, rather

"If you mean to inquire whether Egerton has endangered his prospects, I can only say that I believe he has."

"But it seems such a little thing," urged Cecil, "merely akin to talking politics in society at home."

"Certainly," said Sir Dugald, "in one way. It is as if a member of the Government, at some very important crisis, should take the opportunity of declaring, at a dinner-party of opponents, that he differed from his party as to the policy to be pursued, and meant to thwart it in every way he could."

"But Charlie never meant that," said Cecil, aghast.

"Probably not," said Sir Dugald; grimly. "It was a momentary indiscretion, but such indiscretions are unpardonable. Support your agents through thick and thin, to the brink of war if necessary, so long as they obey orders and act with common-sense; but you must get rid of them and disavow their actions the moment you find they are swayed by enthusiasm, or fanaticism, or too much zeal, or anything of the kind."

"But surely you must expect them to be either angels or machines," said Cecil. "Have you no enthusiasms, Sir Dugald?"

"I have preferences, unfortunately, but I do my best to nullify them. When I find myself sympathising with one party, I make it a point to do the other rather more than justice."

"But that is unfair to the first party," objected Cecil. "Why should they suffer because they have your sympathy?"

"I don't know—to show them I am not an angel, I suppose," said Sir Dugald.

"But still," said Cecil, returning to the charge, "I can't quite see why it should be so very wrong and dangerous for Dr Egerton to have said what he did."

"Simply for this reason, that what he said was

calculated to foster in the minds of the Armenians the mischievous delusion that they will be supported, unofficially at any rate, by England if they rebel. News of such a kind spreads like wildfire, and is likely to make the task of Turkish government more difficult. Now we are here to bolster up Turkey, as these people put ropes round an old house to keep it together in a storm, and Egerton tries to spoil our work."

"But is it right to bolster up Turkey?" asked Cecil, doubtfully.

"Oh, if we are coming to questions of morals, I shall have to take a back seat," said Sir Dugald. "I will only say this, I conscientiously believe that if Turkey fell to-morrow, a far worse tyranny would ensue. You would not remember the Polish horrors, but we heard plenty about them when I was young."

"And Dr Yehudi has told me of the persecutions of the Jews," murmured Cecil.

"Exactly. So you see what we are doing. We are keeping up a bad state of things for fear of a worse. The Turks are sensible enough not to kick, but we can't expect them to like our helping them, and they don't feel inclined to give us any assistance. They won't make the slightest attempt to whitewash themselves in order to spare our feelings, or make our proceedings look better to the world. We do what we can to put down atrocities, but changes of policy at home and changes of ambassador at Constantinople have succeeded in frittering away most of our moral influence, and we can't descend to brute force. It's inexpedient, and it's ungentlemanly. We are the stronger party, and we can't hit a State weaker than ourselves. Now do you see where the doctor went wrong? He let his feelings carry him away, and said

just what came into his head, regardless of all this. His tongue has got him into trouble before, you know."

"Yes, I know," said Cecil, with a sigh. "Isn't it wonderful that he can manage to keep safe when he disguises himself as a native?"

"I am afraid that it shows he has the power of silence, but does not care to exercise it except on great occasions," said Sir Dugald, with a peculiar smile.

"But what do you think he had better do now?" asked Cecil.

"Lie low for a little, I should say. I am thinking of sending him and D'Silva out to Takht-Iskandar for a week or two's shooting. Now that the *Nausicaa* is here, her surgeon can look after the hospital. But I give you fair warning, Miss Anstruther, that if there is any more foolishness on the doctor's part he will have to pack. If you can impress that on him I shall be thankful."

And Sir Dugald gave up his place to Charlie, who was approaching, and went away muttering, "She thinks he can keep quiet when he is disguised, so that the natives don't find him out, does she? I believe they take him for a madman, and so let him go unmolested." But in this he was unjust to Charlie, who, as he himself had once said, seemed to put on a different nature with his oriental garb.

Cecil returned to the Palace that night feeling nervous and depressed. It was as though a foreboding of coming trouble was hanging over her, and she tried in vain to reason herself into the belief that the depression was purely physical, and due to the fact that the weather was hot and thundery. The next day the storm came. It was unusually early in the season

for thunder, but the Baghdadis said they had seldom known a more tremendous storm. It began about mid-day, when Cecil and her pupil were taking their usual rest, and Azim Bey was declaring his views on the subject of a book he had been reading. It was nearly time for dinner, but the sky became suddenly dark, and the trembling servants, leaving their work, crept into the lower part of the schoolroom and sat huddled together. Azim Bey was constitutionally timid on some occasions, and he exhibited now such fear as almost paralysed him. He crouched in a corner, shuddering at every fresh flash of lightning, and trembling violently when the thunder crashed, his face ashy white with terror. The wind howled and shrieked around the house, tearing off projecting portions of the ornamentation, and making such a noise that no one could be heard speaking. Cecil caught a glimpse once, by the glare of the lightning, of her pupil's face, and its expression surprised her. Fear was portrayed there, as she expected, but also a tremendous determination. Azim Bey's lips were locked together as though he were defying all the powers of the storm to force him to disclose something he was resolved to keep secret.

The thunder and lightning diminished in intensity at last, the wind ceased to howl, and daylight returned in some measure, but the rain continued to pour down, and the roof was discovered to be letting in water in streams. Azim Bey, whose courage had now returned, roused the servants from their lethargy of terror and set them to work to repair the leaks, finding himself in his element as he sat upon the divan and directed operations. When the roof was made fairly water-tight again, he despatched the women to bring

in the long-delayed dinner, and when the meal was over, requested Cecil politely to bring her photograph-album and tell him about her brothers. Cecil complied, wondering to find him so agreeably disposed. Ordinarily, after such a display of timidity as that of the morning, he was wont to swagger and bluster a good deal in order to remove the impression. But this evening his behaviour was perfect. He was deeply interested, as usual, in the young Anstruthers, and particularly in Fitz's adventures with his latest possession, the camera Cecil had given him, by means of which he had succeeded in sending out to his sister painful and most unflattering portraits of the rest of the family. In after-days Cecil looked back to this evening to try whether she could discover in her pupil's manner any signs of compunction for the work he had in hand, but she could remember none. He was cheerfully polite, with the kind of politeness a magnanimous conqueror might show to a prisoner in his power. No youthful Black Prince could have been more courteous than he was.

The next morning, however, things were changed. Azim Bey was summoned by a message from his father to attend a grand State ceremony, the investment of Ahmed Khémi Pasha with the insignia of a very exalted order sent direct from Constantinople by the hands of a special functionary. The welcome to be accorded to the envoy of the Padishah, and the formalities of the investiture, would occupy the whole day, and Azim Bey resented strongly the command he received to be present. He grumbled for some time because Cecil could not come with him, and went off at last in a very bad temper, leaving her pleasantly occupied in writing her letters home.

It was Um Yusuf who first scented something wrong. Cecil could never discover whether her silent attendant had suspected that mischief was brewing, and had laid her plans accordingly, or not; but it is certain that she could not be found when Azim Bey desired to speak to her, and give her a few directions for her mistress's comfort before he went out, and that she reappeared some time after his departure, with the excuse that she had met her cousin in the bazaar and had been having a talk with her. This she explained volubly in the presence of Basmeh Kalfa and old Ayesha, and then curled herself up on the carpet for her mid-day nap; but as soon as the other two had dropped off to sleep, she rose, and approaching Cecil with her finger on her lips, laid a note on the table before her. The handwriting was Lady Haigh's, and Cecil tore the envelope open in alarm. The letter was short:—

“MY DEAREST CECIL,—Come to me *immediately*. Let *nothing* prevent you, if you wish to escape *eternal regret*. Put on your riding-habit under your sheet, and bring *no one* but Um Yusuf.”

“You go, mademoiselle?” asked Um Yusuf in a whisper, as she met Cecil's terrified eyes. Cecil nodded, and rose from her table. They passed on tiptoe between the sleeping women (Um Yusuf had adroitly placed herself in such a position that they could not block the door) and gained their own rooms. Um Yusuf knew only that the note had been placed in her hand by a cavass from the Consulate, with a warning to deliver it secretly and at once, together with an intimation that the man would wait at a certain spot outside the Palace to escort Mdlla. Antaza to the Residency, if she decided to come. More she could

not tell, and Cecil hurried into her riding-habit and arranged the sheet over it. They left the courtyard without remark, for Mas'ud was in attendance on Azim Bey, and at the great gate the guards knew them and let them pass. They met the cavass at the appointed place, and hastened through the streets to the Residency under his guardianship. At the gate they were met by Mr D'Silva, one of the clerks, who took them to Lady Haigh at once.

"O, Lady Haigh, what is it?" gasped Cecil.

"It is a great trouble, dear," said Lady Haigh, taking her in her arms.

"Is it Charlie?"

"Yes, dear; it is Charlie."

CHAPTER XIX.

"BETWIXT MY LOVE AND ME"

"Is he—is he——" faltered Cecil.

"Not *dead*, my dear? oh no! how could you imagine that?" cried Lady Haigh, in great excitement; "nor hurt, nor even in danger, I hope, at present. But the horses are ready. Let us start at once, and I will tell you about it as we go along. Mr D'Silva is coming with us."

They left the Residency and rode in single file through the narrow streets of the city; but once outside the gate, Mr D'Silva withdrew to a respectful distance with the cavasses, and Lady Haigh and Cecil were left side by side.

"Now, Lady Haigh, please tell me," cried Cecil, whose brain had been busy conjuring up horrors the whole time.

"You must be brave, my dear child, and thankful—thankful that you are able to see Charlie once more, when it was just a chance that they didn't succeed in keeping you from him."

"Lady Haigh!" Cecil almost screamed, "they haven't put him in prison?"

"No, my dear, no. Your imagination certainly dwells

on horrors. Wait a little, and I will tell you it all. You know that for some time Charlie has been very unpopular in the city, and that the *budmashes*, as we should call them in India, have been shouting bad names after him in the streets? Well, it has been a great mystery why this should be, for he got on so very well with the Baghdadis in his first two years here, but now it seems that they have come to regard him in some way as a spy. Of course there has been mischief at work, somebody has been slandering him, but that doesn't make it any better. Naturally I knew all this, but nothing more, and what has happened to-day has been a tremendous shock. Very early this morning Sir Dugald received a letter from the Pasha, brought by Ovannes Effendi. I don't know what was in it, but Denarien Bey called just about the same time, and they were all three closeted together. Then Denarien Bey and the other man went away, and Sir Dugald sent for Charlie. I had no idea that there was anything wrong, or even out of the common, and you may conceive my astonishment when Charlie came rushing to me in a fearful state and told me that Sir Dugald had ordered him to proceed at once to Bandr Abbas, right away down the Gulf, and remain there until further orders. They have an outbreak of cholera there, and their doctor is overworked and has telegraphed for help. Of course Charlie didn't mind the cholera, but he was to start to-day, by the steamer leaving this very morning."

"Oh, Lady Haigh, he isn't *gone*?" cried Cecil.

"You may well be astonished, dear. I assure you I laughed at the notion of such a thing. 'My dear boy,' I said to Charlie, 'you have made some mistake. Wait here, and I will go and speak to Sir Dugald.' And I went, Cecil, and it was true. Sir Dugald was very

busy, getting ready to go to this wretched investiture, and I couldn't make him tell me all I wanted to know, or else my brain was in such a whirl that it didn't penetrate properly. All that I could make out was that the Pasha had sent to say that Charlie was a spy, and that he couldn't have him in the city any longer—which, of course, is utter nonsense—and that he had better leave as soon as possible, for that the *budmashes* were crying out for his blood. That was true enough, my dear; there was a mob of them in front of the gate howling out the most dreadful things. I never felt so thunder-struck and so much at a loss in my life. It was as if the world's foundations were shaking, or we were in a transformation scene at a pantomime. There has been absolutely nothing to account for all these extraordinary events, but yet they have happened, and Charlie must go. I begged and entreated Sir Dugald to let him wait for the next steamer, but he asked me whether I wanted to have his blood upon my head, and said he should see him safely on board before he started for this thing. Well, my dear, I saw that there was no doing anything with Sir Dugald, so I went back to poor Charlie. He was nearly wild, and I can tell you I was not much better, what with getting all his things packed in such a hurry, and everything. He wanted to force his way into the Palace and insist on seeing you, but it would have been throwing his life away to venture into the town, and Sir Dugald absolutely forbade it, and told him he would have him put under arrest if he tried it. Then the poor fellow and I managed to devise a plan. I wasn't going to let him be driven away without saying good-bye to you."

"Oh, thank you, Lady Haigh," murmured Cecil, her eyes wet.

"So I made up my mind what to do," continued Lady Haigh; "I just took the law into my hands, for I knew it was no use speaking to Sir Dugald, and if he is angry I don't mind."

"But he couldn't help all this," Cecil's sense of justice impelled her to say. "What could he have done?"

"My dear," responded Lady Haigh, in the true Jingo spirit, "he could have torn up the Pasha's letter and sent him back the pieces. He could have said to those two poor wretched Armenians, 'Go and tell your master, if he wants to get rid of Dr Egerton, to come and turn him out.' And he could have called out the guard and armed the servants, and defended the Residency as long as there were two stones left on one another, and he ought to have done it, rather than get rid of Charlie at the beck of an upstart like Ahmed Khémi."

And Lady Haigh paused for breath after this tremendous burst of eloquence.

"But the plan?" asked Cecil. "Where are we going now?"

"I was just telling you, dear. As I said, I took the law into my own hands. I saw the captain of the steamer, and I put the whole affair before him. Sometimes, you know, honesty is really the best policy. I said to him, 'Captain Wheen, you are a sailor'—that flattered him, because of course his voyages are all confined to the river—and I want your help in a very delicate matter. You may have heard that my cousin, Dr Egerton, is ordered down to Bandr Abbas to help with the cholera there. Now he is engaged to the young lady they call Mdle. Antaza, at the Palace, the Pasha's English governess, and it will break her heart if he goes without saying good-bye to her.' I could see that Captain Wheen was very much touched; but

he pretended he wasn't, and said very gruffly, 'I can't delay the sailing of the *Seleucia* for any Pasha or Resident's lady on earth.' I said, 'Captain Wheen, I am sure you know that I would not on any account have you break your rules, or get into trouble with your owners. What I want to say is this. Dr Egerton was to start to-morrow for a little shooting at Takht-Iskandar, and his things were all sent there early to-day before we heard of this. Now I ask you, would it be possible for you to stop off Takht-Iskandar and allow him and his servant to go on shore for an hour or two, to pack up the things and bring them on board? That would give me time to send a note to the Palace, and come out to Takht-Iskandar.' 'I can't do that,' he said. 'You see, if we took to letting passengers go on shore where they liked to fetch more luggage, it would sink the ship at last, besides doubling the length of the voyage; but I can tell you this, ma'am, in confidence—the engines of the *Seleucia* are wonderfully cranky. Now if anything was to go wrong with those engines, and we had to lie-to for an hour or so to set it right, I shouldn't wonder if it was to happen just off Takht-Iskandar, and then of course the doctor might go on shore and fetch his togs. Now there's just that chance, ma'am, and it would never surprise me if it was to happen. Engines are queer things,' and I believe he winked at me. That was all that I could get out of him; but it did what I wanted, so I settled matters with Charlie. He was to make as long a business of his packing as he possibly could, and I was to bring you out to say good-bye to him. I didn't know how to reach you, for I was afraid they wouldn't admit me at the Palace; but I thought a note might get in. So I sent it off; but I don't think it would ever have got

to you if Um Yusuf hadn't met her cousin in the bazaar and loitered talking to her."

"But why do you think there would have been any difficulty?" asked Cecil.

"My dear, is it possible you don't see that this is all a plot? There is some deep purpose behind these extraordinary events, and the only purpose I can conceive is that of separating you and Charlie. You tell me that Azim Bey dislikes him, and I can quite believe that he is capable of very strong childish jealousy. Mind, I don't think he managed all the details. There is some older and wiler person behind—possibly the Um-ul-Pasha or Jamileh Khanum. At any rate, Azim Bey had taken his precautions very carefully, and if he had not been summoned away the note would never have got to you, and Charlie would have gone without your even saying good-bye to him. So, my dear, be thankful."

"Oh, Lady Haigh!" remonstrated Cecil. She could say no more: the blow was too sudden, too dreadful. She rode along in silence, while Lady Haigh poured forth stores of comfortless comfort, and adjured her to be cheerful when she met Charlie. Cheerful! the very word was a mockery. The gloomy unsettled skies and muddy plain seemed to accord better with her mood than did Lady Haigh's philosophy. They were approaching Takht-Iskandar now, and everything looked sad and sodden. All the glory of the white and pink and purple fruit-blossom was gone, and little green fruits alone represented the promise of a month ago. The palace, always flimsy and dilapidated-looking, was sorely battered and damaged by the storm of yesterday, and the trees were beaten down and in many cases stripped of their leaves. The riders approached softly along the

sandy road, and paused at the corner of the house, where Mr D'Silva left his horse and went on to reconnoitre. Presently he came back, and, helping the two ladies to dismount, led them in at a side-door which was unfastened, and on through various passages and unfurnished rooms until they reached the dining-room, where Charlie, with his Armenian boy Hanna, was engaged in separating his shooting requisites from those of Mr D'Silva—their possessions having been sent on together.

"Well, Charlie," said Lady Haigh, marching into the room, "doing your guns on this table, are you? Take them away into the smoking-room this instant, Hanna, and finish them there. How long have you been here, Charlie?"

"Hours, Cousin Elma," groaned Charlie, with Cecil's hands locked in his.

"Then you had better go back to the *Seleucia* at once," said Lady Haigh, promptly.

"One hour, ten minutes, milady," put in Hanna, as he carried off the guns.

"Then you can have half an hour, Charlie—not a moment more, and even that is trading on Captain Wheen's kindness in a most shameful way. Mr D'Silva, if you will be so kind as to see that no one interrupts us for half an hour, we shall be eternally grateful to you. We can trust you for that, I think?"

"I am an Englishman, Lady Haigh," replied Mr D'Silva, more in sorrow than in anger, as he withdrew, quite unconscious that he was saying the very thing which, as Lady Haigh remarked afterwards, when she remembered to be cynical, an Englishman would not have said.

"Now, Charlie," said Lady Haigh, when he was gone, "make the most of your time. Never mind me," and she sat down on the divan and composed herself as if for a nap, while Charlie and Cecil wandered to the other end of the room and enjoyed the luxury of being thoroughly miserable. For some time Cecil could do nothing but cry, with her head on Charlie's shoulder, while he tried to comfort her, but found the situation so devoid of comfort that he failed miserably.

"Ten minutes more," came in a sepulchral voice from the corner where Lady Haigh sat, engrossed now with a tattered copy of the Army and Navy Stores list. Cecil roused herself with a sob.

"Oh, Charlie," she said, "what shall I do without you?"

"Look here, my darling," said Charlie, energetically, struck with a sudden idea; "just listen to me one moment. I can't bear to leave you here among all these wretches. Will you—could you—marry me at once? If you would, I——"

"Charlie!" was interjected sharply by Lady Haigh.

"I would come back to the Residency, and we could get Dr Yehudi to marry us. Then you would come with me, and we should not be parted after all."

"I think, young man, you are forgetting that you would have to reckon with Sir Dugald," said Lady Haigh, grimly. "I am astonished at your innocence. After knocking about the world for so long, can you really imagine that it is as easy to get married as to order your breakfast at a hotel?"

"Besides, I wouldn't have you venture back into Baghdad for anything," said Cecil.

"Then I will wait at Basra for three weeks, or as long as the regulations require," said Charlie, eagerly,

"and Cousin Elma will bring you down there. O, Cecil my darling, do say yes."

"Oh, Charlie!" sighed Cecil, but in a moment her face changed and grew firm; "I can't do it—it would be wrong. Why, Charlie, you forget that I am pledged to stay here for more than two years and a half still. I can't leave my post. My duty is here, and yours, I suppose, is at Bandr Abbas. When Azim Bey's education is finished, then I shall be at liberty to leave Baghdad, and then——"

"Can't you come now, dear?" he pleaded. "I don't want to persuade you if it is really your duty to stay, but I think that Azim Bey's conduct has not been so considerate that you need strain matters on his account. Think of our going home together, Cecil, and seeing all your people again."

"Don't," murmured Cecil, brokenly; "you make me so miserable, Charlie. You can't think how I want to see Whitcliffe again, and all of them. But I mustn't go. It isn't right. I can't break my promise. You know you wouldn't respect me yourself if I did such a thing. So I must stay, and you must go. Besides, there is another reason. If you resigned now, and stayed at Basra, and went home afterwards, instead of going to Bandr Abbas, they would say you were afraid of the cholera, and I couldn't bear that any one should think that of you. No, I have some consideration for you, Charlie dear, though I have got you into such trouble. I was thinking as we came along that it might have been better for you if you had never met me at all."

"Not a bit of it!" cried Charlie. "Never think that again, Cecil. Why, before I met you I was a regular loafer, just doing a spell of work in one place and then getting myself sent on somewhere else, and never set-

ting down. But now I have something to work for, something to look forward to. I should have missed the chief good of my life if I had never met you. No, dear, knowing you has done everything for me, and I am as thankful as I can be for it now, and I always shall be. As for this trouble, no doubt it comes because otherwise I should be too happy."

"Your time is nearly up, Cecil," said Lady Haigh. "Don't you want to give Charlie any cautions about taking care of himself at Bandr Abbas?"

"No, I don't think so," said Cecil. "I know he will do his duty wherever he is, and I also know that he will remember me and not let himself be careless about taking proper precautions, and that sort of thing."

"And every evening," said Charlie, "I shall go up to the wind-tower and look in the direction of Baghdad, and imagine that you are standing on the roof of the Palace and looking towards Bandr Abbas."

"When she will probably be having her tea with Azim Bey quietly in the cellar," said Lady Haigh. "Don't be sentimental, Charlie. I detest sentiment."

"When you leave Bandr Abbas, do you think it possible that you will be allowed to come back here?" asked Cecil.

"I'm afraid not," said Charlie. "It's not likely, is it, Cousin Elma? No; I may be sent somewhere else in the Gulf, or to Aden, if Sir Dugald is kind enough to give me a good character, but this business with the Pasha will probably prevent my ever coming back to Baghdad."

"But the mystery may be cleared up, and everything put right," suggested Cecil, hopefully. "You would come back if you were asked, Charlie?"

"Rather! I would come back as bottle-washer to a

Bengali *babu*, like the doctor they have at Muscat," said Charlie, "but I'm afraid the Persian shore of the Gulf will be my nearest point."

"But, Charlie," said Lady Haigh, "do you really think of taking another post? You have not been home for a long time, and your property must be all going to rack and ruin. Why not resign when you have seen them through at Bandr Abbas, and go home to look after things a little?"

"I don't want to go home until I can take Cecil," said Charlie. "Besides, she prefers me to have something to do instead of loafing."

"But if you have land and tenants at home, they ought to be looked after," said Cecil. "I never realised it before."

"What an unworldly young person you are!" said Charlie. "Yes, there's all that, but Aunt Frederica looks after it for me."

"By all means, my dear boy, go home and get the place ready for Cecil, and make acquaintance with her people," said Lady Haigh. "But don't let Frederica choose your carpets and curtains for you. Her taste is atrocious. And now, Cecil, you have had thirty-five minutes, so say good-bye and come."

"Just one minute more, Cousin Elma," pleaded Charlie.

"Not a second," said Lady Haigh. "Now, Charlie, not another scene of misery,—I can't stand it. Say good-bye quickly, my dear boy. If you harrow up Cecil's feelings again, it will be too much for her."

"I beg your pardon," said Mr D'Silva's voice at the door, "but the boat is waiting for Dr Egerton."

"Now, Charlie, my dear boy," said poor Lady Haigh, entreatingly, as Charlie still stood with his arms round

Cecil. "You will get us all into trouble, you know, and we have really done all we could for you, and Sir Dugald will be so much vexed. Good-bye, my dear boy. Now let her go. Take care of yourself, and don't be rash. No, you are not to come farther than this. I will look after Cecil. My dear child, don't faint. I don't know what will happen to us if you do. Charlie, I will *not* have you come any farther. Go back, and get on board. Mr D'Silva, please give Miss Anstruther your arm to the door. Charlie, go back. My dear boy, good-bye. Give Cecil's love to her people."

And Lady Haigh, reiterating her instructions and prohibitions in a voice choked with tears, followed Cecil and Mr D'Silva along the passage, turning suddenly to find that Charlie was following her stealthily, bent on getting another sight of Cecil. She drove him back again with one of her quick bursts of passion, and hurried to the spot where the horses were waiting. She and Mr D'Silva helped Cecil into the saddle, for she was in a numb, dazed condition, and he led her horse through the wood and into the road. Pausing only once, to see the *Seleucia* passing out of sight round a bend in the stream, they rode swiftly back to Baghdad, which looked dull and miserable under the clouded sky, with mud under foot and sodden palm-trees overhead, and a turbid, rapidly flowing river that could not reflect the mean houses on either side.

When Azim Bey returned that night from the ceremony of the investiture, he was surprised to find his courtyard almost in darkness. Going into the school-room, he found that the only light came from the glowing charcoal in the brazier, beside which Cecil was crouching, still in her riding-habit. The wind had

risen again, and was howling round the house and in the beams of the roof, and the whole scene was one of desolation.

"Are you ill, mademoiselle?" asked Azim Bey, in the most natural tone he could devise, while one of the negresses followed him in, carrying a torch, which shed a flickering light on the darkness. Cecil said nothing, but looked up at him with eyes of such sadness that they haunted him in spite of his efforts to banish the impression.

"I do not understand you, mademoiselle," he said, unblushingly, in reply to her unspoken reproof.

"You have driven Dr Egerton away," she said.

"I ask your pardon, mademoiselle. How was I to know that you had any special interest in the English doctor?"

"But you did know," said Cecil, wearily. She had not spirit to contend with her pupil that night.

"But, mademoiselle, that is impossible. You have never told me; you would not even let me approach the subject. How was I to know?"

"How can I tell?" asked Cecil. "I feel sure that you did know, and that all this is your doing. Well, Bey, you have won the victory; I hope you enjoy it. Good-night." And he saw her no more that evening.

CHAPTER XX.

INTERCEPTED LETTERS.

her own room that night, Cecil, in the first strength of her grief and desolation, took a solemn resolution never on any account to mention Charlie to Azim Bey again. He was jealous of him—well, he should have more cause to be so. So far as her intercourse with her pupil went, all should be as though Charlie had never existed. In view of the armed neutrality which had hitherto subsisted between them on this subject, it was not, perhaps, quite clear in what way she could do more than she had already done, but it soothed her feelings to make these resolutions. She would never allude to her engagement in conversation with Azim Bey again, not if she were dying for a sight of Charlie. Even though all that had happened was to be ascribed to his unfeeling interposition, she would never degrade herself and Charlie so far as to seek his help in setting things right, nor yet to recur to the part he had played in the events which had just occurred. After all, she had come to Baghdad to teach Azim Bey, and not to find a husband for herself, and it might be that her pupil considered himself justified in objecting to her meddling herself in such extraneous matters. At

any rate, he should not have to complain of this again. She would devote herself more earnestly than ever to his education, but he should never be so far honoured as to have Charlie's name mentioned in his hearing.

The plan seemed to work beautifully. Cecil laboured long the next morning in removing from her face the traces left by her tears and by an almost sleepless night, and appeared in the schoolroom as if the events of the day before had never occurred. Azim Bey understood the situation perfectly, and accepted it. He was very gracious, and he could afford to be so, for he had gained all he wanted. Nothing could well have been more delightful than his behaviour—it might almost be called chivalrous. If Cecil had not had the memory of yesterday to warn her, she might have been tempted to imagine that her young barbarian was becoming a gentleman; but her eyes were opened now, and she could only wonder and admire, without being convinced.

The days passed on. Sir Dugald received a telegram from Bandr Abbas to say that Charlie had reached that place safely, and found an extraordinary amount of work awaiting him. After that there came a long unbroken silence. From the Indian newspapers, and through official channels, they heard occasionally that the epidemic was running its course, and that the two surgeons were working heroically among the sick and dying, but there did not come one single message from Charlie himself. Cecil was astonished, but she never thought of blaming him. Possibly he would not write to her lest the letter should convey infection, and he was certainly overwhelmed with work, very likely with insufficient leisure even for needed rest. In this belief she bestowed all the more pains on her own letters, doing

her best, by means of their fulness and tenderness, to bridge over the distance which separated her from her lover, so far as this could be done from one side only.

At last Sir Dugald received another telegram, which said that before resigning his position under Government, Charlie was making a tour of inspection, in company with a high medical official, of the British settlements in the Gulf. The cholera had been stamped out at Bandr Abbas, and when this tour was over, Charlie was going home. The telegram concluded with the words, "Letters all missed," which seemed to shed a little light on the mystery of the sender's long silence. No doubt he had written, but in some way or other all his letters had gone astray. It was strange, however, that even after this none arrived. Sir Dugald expressed it as his opinion that Charlie must go about looking for pumps in which to post his letters, under the impression that they were pillar-boxes; but Lady Haigh and Cecil held firmly to the belief that, moving about as he was from place to place, he was too busy to write. In vain did Sir Dugald, who had assumed quite a paternal authority over Cecil since their confidential talk on the Sunday preceding Charlie's departure, urge her to bring her lover to a sense of his undeserved blessings by suspending her own letters for a time—she felt that this was impossible. The long journal-letters supplied the place to her of the Sunday afternoon talks which she had been accustomed to enjoy. A third telegram informed them that Charlie was going home, and gave his English address very clearly. "Letters still gone wrong," it said again, and Cecil triumphed over Sir Dugald, although he told her that she was only saving Charlie's character as a lover at the expense of his common-sense.

The news of Dr Egerton's resignation of his post was now public property, and people began to perceive merits which they had hitherto ignored in the way he had performed his duties. His colleague at Bandr Abbas and the rest of the English community there were loud in their praises of his behaviour during the epidemic, and this caused his former adventurous journeys, undertaken for the purpose of investigating the diffusion of the disease, to be brought to mind. Even the fact of his having been instrumental in checking the spread of a cholera epidemic in his former post,—a success which had been followed, as he had told Cecil bitterly long before, by his enforced resignation,—was recalled, and one or two very hard things were said of the superior who had insisted on his removal. In fact, he was the hero of the hour among a certain set in India, chiefly consisting, it is to be feared, of those who had been disappointed and passed over, like himself, but numbering in their ranks some few who could command a hearing in the Press. The remarks of the Indian papers were balm to the souls of Cecil and Lady Haigh, and they read with avidity all that was said in Charlie's praise, although Lady Haigh once remarked sadly—

"It all comes too late, Cecil. A little of this encouragement and appreciation, bestowed three years ago, would have saved this 'valuable public servant,' whose loss they deplore so feelingly, to the public service, for he would have stayed in India, and persevered in trying for a better post, instead of taking this as a forlorn-hope."

"And then we should never have met!" said Cecil. "Well, Lady Haigh, I am sorry if you are."

To which no answer could be made, and Lady Haigh

ceased her lamentations. But time was passing on, and still there came no news from Charlie, with the exception of one telegram announcing his safe arrival in England. Things were becoming more and more mysterious. Why should four telegrams alone, all addressed to Sir Dugald, arrive out of all the missives which it was tolerably certain Charlie had sent off? Cecil felt sure that he could never have received her letters without answering them; what, then, had become of the answers? It was not until Christmas-time that the mystery was solved. Cecil was at the Residency as usual, and when the mail came in she looked eagerly to see whether there were any letters for her. Again she was disappointed; there was only one, and this was a bulky epistle from her stepmother. The appearance of the letter was characteristic of the writer. The many closely-written sheets were stuffed into a thin envelope much too small for them, and this had naturally resented such treatment by giving way, in consequence of which it had been "found open, and officially sealed." The direction was blotted and irregular, and had evidently been written in a violent hurry; and the stamp, which was upside down, was of double the proper value. Cecil laughed at the appearance of the envelope, and mentally pictured little Mrs Anstruther writing in feverish haste to catch the mail, and scrambling the letter into the post just in time. As usual, the first page was dated about a fortnight earlier than the last, and Cecil hurried on to the end. Here at last was the news for which she had been longing.

"Oh, my dear Cecil," wrote Mrs Anstruther, "we have had such a delightful surprise. Your friend Dr Egerton came to see us yesterday, and we talked about

you for hours and hours. Your father and I are greatly pleased with him, and the little children love him already. He is staying at the Imperial Hotel, and his aunt is there too, but she has not her health here, and I don't think this place suits her. They seem very well off, and Fitz says that one of the boys at the school told him that Dr Egerton has really an immensity of money, for it has been accumulating for him ever since he has been in the East. But, dear childie, why don't you write to him? Indeed, indeed, I think you are not treating him well. He says he has never had one single line from you, though he has written to you every week. It is not kind of you, and we were so greatly astonished to hear it that we couldn't think of any excuses for you. Sure the poor boy"—these four words were scratched out, for Mrs Anstruther flattered herself that both her literary style and her accent were extremely English—"Poor Dr Egerton is deeply in love with you, but he said himself he could not understand it. Indeed he was in a great state lest something had happened to you, but we were able to reassure him about that——"

Cecil read thus far, and then looked up with a horrified face.

"Lady Haigh!" she gasped, "every one of my letters has missed, as well as Charlie's. What can it be?"

"Impossible, my dear!" cried Lady Haigh, briskly. "You must have mistaken what he says. Is his letter from home?"

"It isn't from him even now," said Cecil. "It's from Mrs Anstruther. There must have been some dreadful mistake, and what can we do?"

"I think this concerns you rather than myself, Miss Anstruther," said Sir Dugald, coming into the room.

I hope I haven't read much of it, but I really did not see at first that the letter which I was desired under such fearful penalties to deliver to you was on the same sheet as my own."

He held out a letter in Charlie's writing, which Cecil almost snatched from his hand. As he said, the first page was occupied by an earnest request to him to give the letter into Miss Anstruther's own hands, as the writer could not help thinking that there had been foul play hitherto with regard to their correspondence. The other three pages contained the letter proper, closely written, and overflowing with passionate anxiety.

"My darling," Charlie concluded, "I am certain there must be something wrong, or you would never have left me without a line all these months. I heard from D'Silva the other day that that fellow Karalampi had been at the Residency a good deal lately, and I should not wonder if he had something to do with it. I do entreat you not on any account to trust him in the very smallest matter. The man is capable of anything. I am consumed with anxiety about you. I was talking yesterday about going out at once to see you and find out what was the matter, but your father said I should only bring you into trouble, and entreated me not to think of such a thing. Dearest, you know I would do anything rather than get you into trouble; but if I can be of the very smallest help or use to you, let me have a wire, and I will start at an hour's notice. Only write, my darling, or I shall go mad."

Cecil dropped the letter with a groan, which attracted the attention of Sir Dugald, who had considerably been discussing his own letters with Lady Haigh while she read it.

"Anything wrong, Miss Anstruther?" he asked, kindly.

"Our letters!" groaned Cecil, "his and mine. Neither of us has ever received one of them, and we have both written once a-week."

"This is serious indeed," said Sir Dugald. "About sixty letters altogether, and spread over more than six months! Well, it is quite evident what has happened, though I confess I should scarcely have thought the game worth the candle in this case. They have been tampering with the mail-bags again."

"Tampering—who?" cried Cecil.

"Interested parties, I presume," said Sir Dugald, drily. "Some post-office clerk who is learning English and likes to study it by means of other people's letters, possibly, but I should scarcely think so. It's an old trick, and they have tried it several times here, but not just lately."

"But can you get the letters back?" asked Cecil.

"Scarcely, I'm afraid. They would be much too compromising to be allowed to remain in the thief's possession. No; but we may be able to stop the robberies in future. I will communicate with Constantinople at once, and set the Embassy to work. Shall we make the abstraction of your love-letters a *casus belli*, Miss Anstruther?"

"It isn't a laughing matter to me," said Cecil, dolefully.

"No, nor to poor Egerton either," said Sir Dugald. "It was a most happy thing that he thought of writing to you under cover to me, or we might never have found out how the trick was worked. You see they have simply suppressed all Egerton's letters to you, and all yours directed to him. Your home letters have arrived as usual, have they not? I thought so. Well, suppose you set Egerton's mind

at rest by telegraphing him a Christmas message at once. I think I can guarantee that it won't go astray from here."

Cecil accepted gratefully Sir Dugald's suggestion, and despatched a sufficiently lengthy message. This done, she had leisure to think over the strange fate of her letters. She could not doubt that their disappearance had been arranged by the same hand that had contrived Charlie's removal from Baghdad, and yet it seemed scarcely likely that Azim Bey would have thought of such a thing. Charlie's suggestion as to M. Karalampi she scouted at once, for what motive could he have for abstracting her letters, even though he had an old grudge against her, and no liking for Charlie? But M. Karalampi was destined to be brought to her mind once again that evening, when she went to have tea with Mrs Hagopidan, of whom she had seen but little of late.

"So I hear you have set up another admirer, Cecil?" said the hostess, when she had inquired and heard the latest news from Whitcliffe.

"I don't know what you mean, Myrta," said Cecil, laughing.

"My dear girl, you must have noticed that M. Karalampi does you the honour to admire you. Of course it's impossible that you could have the bad taste not to admire him."

"I think you forget that I am engaged," said Cecil, in her stateliest manner.

"Not at all, dear, nor does he. He only thinks that it is a merciful dispensation of Providence which has removed Dr Egerton from Baghdad and left the way clear for him. They didn't love each other, those two. Really, Cecil, I could have danced at times to

see Dr Egerton freeze him with a look, and to behold the murderous glances M. Karalampi bestowed upon him behind his back. He daren't have looked at you then,—it would have been as much as his life was worth,—but now he has a fair field. How do you like him, dear?"

"Myrta, you know that if there is a person I detest, it's that man. I wish you would not make up these things about him. I don't like it."

"But I am perfectly in earnest, I assure you—much more so than he is. Of course he only intends a flirtation, just to pass the time, for he has a wife somewhere. Some people say he has a wife in a good many places, but no doubt that is merely scandal. But seriously, Cecil, the creature has the conceit to believe that now that Dr Egerton is safely out of the way, his own charms will prove irresistible. I believe he has a bet with young Vogorides on the subject. His sister, Arghiro, let something drop about it when she was here yesterday, and I thought I would give you warning."

"Thank you, Myrta. I don't think M. Karalampi will make any more bets about me."

"But you won't make a scene, Cecil?"

"I don't think I am likely to want the world to know how M. Karalampi thinks of me," said Cecil, as she rose to go, and her hostess could learn no more from her. Nor, to her great disappointment, did she ever succeed in finding out the exact results of her warning. Whether Cecil snubbed M. Karalampi in public, or administered a few home-truths to him in private, Mrs Hagopidan never knew, but M. Karalampi's visits to the Residency became once more few and far between, and Arghiro Vogorides let slip that

her brother had won his bet, but could not get the money paid. That was all, and Cecil went on her way satisfied, and unconscious that her own name was added, deeply underlined, to the long list in M. Karalampi's black-books. In this list there were to be found already all the names of those from whom he had received slights, or against whom he had conceived a grudge, and also of some of those whom he had injured, and therefore found it impossible to forgive. In which category the Pasha's name appeared it would be difficult to say,—possibly in all three,—but both that of the Um-ul-Pasha and that of Azim Bey might have been found in the first. Most of M. Karalampi's employers were in his black-books, and it was one of the chief beauties of his peculiar method of working that he was able to play them off one against another, and to punish them all in the course of business.

The account against Azim Bey was allowed to stand over for a while just now. By way of making himself agreeable to all parties, M. Karalampi had done what the Bey wanted, and succeeded in banishing Charlie from Baghdad. He had even improved upon his instructions by arranging for the abstraction of the letters, a master-stroke which delighted Azim Bey when it was communicated to him; but now he returned to his former employers, whose interests were by no means identical with those of Cecil's pupil. The Um-ul-Pasha was once more embarked on a plot in favour of her eldest grandson, but this time M. Karalampi held the threads in his own hands, and the result bade fair to be a work of art. The old vulgar methods of secret assassination, which had been attempted in vain two years before, were decisively dropped, and M. Kara-

gements were useless, and they recognised this fact
or a good deal of mutual recrimination on the subject
the delay which had occurred. It was undeniable
t Hussein Bey's death had been so utterly unex-
ted that the wisest head could not have arranged
dénouement of the plot in time, and nothing more
ld be done.

CHAPTER XXI.

CONFEDERATES.

AFTER this, things went on quietly enough until it was a year and a half since Charlie had left Baghdad. Only a year now remained of Cecil's stay at the Palace, and Azim Bey was growing so tall and manly that she felt it was quite time he should soon leave her care. He was just fourteen and a half, but looked much older than his age, and he had made wonderful progress in his studies. He was an excellent talker and a most agreeable companion, with a wide theoretical acquaintance with modern political and social problems, and a deep practical knowledge of Eastern ways of settling them. There was something uncanny in such shrewdness in a boy of his age, and fond though Cecil was of him, she could now never quite trust him. The subject of Charlie had not again been mentioned between them, although Cecil sometimes felt curious to know whether her pupil had got over his childish dislike. Since the discovery of the fate of their first six months' letters, she and Charlie had corresponded with more success, owing to the precautions they had adopted. Charlie's letters were addressed to Sir Dugald at the Residency, and Cecil posted hers there after Sir Dugald had written

the address. The abstraction of the earlier epistles had been traced to an Armenian post-office clerk who had died in the interval between the discovery of the theft and the investigation subsequently made into it, and although for this reason no punishment could be inflicted, the desires of any who might be anxious to tread in the offender's footsteps were frustrated. Whatever the suspicions of the would-be thieves might be, they dared not stop a letter addressed by or to the Balio Bey himself.

There were other ways of getting news, notably by means of letters concealed in parcels, or brought by friends from England, and it was by the former means that Cecil received the season's greetings on the occasion of her fourth Christmas in Baghdad. A great box was sent out from Whitcliffe to Mrs Yehudi, containing presents for the school-children's Christmas-tree, and among the presents was a letter for Cecil, very carefully and cunningly hidden. She tore it open eagerly, wondering why it should be sent with such special care, but found nothing of any unusual importance until she came to the last paragraph, which filled her with a vague dread.

"I don't feel as though I should be able to stay quiet in England all next year. The travel-spirit is coming upon me again, and drawing me Eastward ho! Perhaps it is not only that, but the longing to see some one in Baghdad, which is drawing me—at any rate, if you don't hear from me for a time, you can imagine me anywhere between Beyrout and Karachi, or between Resht and Aden. But perhaps I shall see you, my dearest girl, without your knowing it. I wouldn't get you into trouble for the world, but I would do anything short of that just to see you for a moment. I should feel

happier about you, and know that that abominable child had not quite worn you out. Don't look out for me, for it's no good. If I come, you won't know it, but I will tell you about it afterwards, and we will laugh over it together."

What could Charlie be intending to do? Surely he could not mean to try and enter Baghdad again, in the face of the danger he had scarcely escaped, but what else did his words signify? He must be only joking, trying to make her look out for him, for the foolishness of an attempt to return to the city must be patent even to his mind. There was no need to be alarmed, nor to frighten Lady Haigh; but Cecil did not feel happy until she had written a long letter scolding Charlie for his mad project, and forbidding him to undertake it. Unhappily, before the letter reached England, Charlie had started for the East, but Cecil was not in a position to know this, as will presently appear.

When Hussein Bey died, it seemed as though the Pasha's family troubles were over, for a time at least, and he looked forward hopefully to a year of domestic peace. Now that she had no one for whom to plot, it was probable that his mother would soon tire of maintaining an irreconcilable attitude, and consent to offer terms of accommodation. The only cloud on the horizon was caused by the behaviour of Jamileh Khanum, who had now a little son of her own, a fact which produced exactly the result which Azim Bey had foreseen long ago. For her boy's sake, Jamileh Khanum was frantically jealous of his elder brother, and every sign of favour bestowed by the Pasha on Azim Bey, every expense incurred on his account, furnished her with a text for a passionate attack on her husband. For months she teased him at every available opportunity to procure

a French governess for little Najib Bey, but in vain. The Pasha had had some experience of the difficulty of keeping the peace between dependents of different European nationalities, and he had no desire that the tranquillity of the Palace should be disturbed by the mutual jealousies and patriotic squabbles of Mdlle. Antaza and any French lady. Jamileh Khanum might have an English nurse for the baby if she liked, and as soon as he was old enough he might share Azim Bey's lessons with Mdlle. Antaza. But both these offers were scouted by the indignant mother. Her boy to share the instructions of that insolent Englishwoman, in company with the son of that wild Arab creature (might her bones not rest in peace!)—never! Rather should he grow up ignorant, a living monument of his father's parsimony and injustice. She had a good deal more to say on the subject, and was proceeding to say it, when her husband, fortunately for himself, was called away.

Much worried by this fresh piece of trouble, Ahmed Khémi Pasha lent a ready ear to a message which reached him shortly before the great Turkish festival of Moharram Ghün. His mother sent to say that she was now advanced in years, a poor widow bereft of her best-beloved grandson, and she wished to be reconciled at the festival to the surviving members of her family. The Um-ul-Pasha was given to these reconciliations, which were generally as shortlived as they were sudden, but her son was touched by the terms of her message, and prepared to meet her half-way. Accordingly he went to see her in the most filial manner possible, was received with all due honour and affection, and invited to partake of coffee and sweetmeats. During this repast his mother electrified him still further by

expressing a desire for reconciliation also with Azim Bey. The Pasha caught eagerly at the idea, for he was well aware of the scandal caused in the city by his divided house, and he proposed to fetch his son at once to pay his respects to his grandmother. But the Um-ul-Pasha was not inclined to be in such a hurry. She had a condition to make before she would consent to a reconciliation, and she brought it forward at once. It was nothing less than a plain demand for Mdlla Antaza's dismissal.

Without giving her son time to express his astonishment or his dismay, the old lady hurried on to give the reasons for her request. The presence of the Frangi woman in the Palace was a direct insult to herself, since she had always opposed her coming; her very position in the household was a scandal, for she was technically in the harem, and yet could visit her European friends when she liked. Moreover, Mdlla Antaza had conducted herself most insolently towards the Um-ul-Pasha during the whole of her stay in Baghdad, had refused the husband graciously recommended to her, and had calmly ignored the great lady's existence ever since. This sounded so very plausible when the little episode of the attempted poisoning was forgotten, that the Um-ul-Pasha paused to admire her own eloquence, but hurried on again when she perceived that her son was about to speak. She had kept her chief argument until last, and now produced it with obvious pride. To dismiss mademoiselle at once would be a great saving of expense. If she remained a year longer, her five years' engagement would have been fulfilled, and she would become entitled to the bonus promised on its termination, while if she were sent away now for misconduct, this extra sum would be saved.

"But there is no misconduct. What charge have you against her?" asked the Pasha, blankly.

"Invent one. There's nothing so easy," replied his mother, instantly. "Karalampi——" she perceived her mistake, and hastily altered the form of the sentence. "I know of a person who will arrange everything, and support it by unimpeachable evidence."

The Pasha sat and pondered the matter deeply, while his mother went on to declare that the Frangi woman had ruined Azim Bey. She had made him into an Englishman, and there was nothing of a Turk left about him. Thus she ran on, with great richness of language and illustration, while the Pasha slowly made up his mind. It was no sentiment of chivalry for a woman fighting the battle of life alone in a foreign country that influenced him finally, but rather a prudent feeling of reluctance to part with a valuable dependent as the price of a reconciliation which could not, in all probability, last more than a month. Then there was the matter of economy. To escape the necessity of paying the bonus would certainly be a saving, but would it be possible to get up an accusation of misconduct which could really be sustained? He had a very clear impression, springing from what he knew of the absolute blamelessness of Cecil's behaviour during her life in the harem, that it would not. To bring such an accusation, and then to fail to substantiate it, would be nothing short of ruinous. He thought apprehensively of the Courts, of the impression in England, where he desired to stand well in public opinion, and he thought above all things of the Balio Bey. Sir Dugald was certainly given to counselling economy, but it was scarcely to be expected that he would approve this particular way of exercising it, while he

would be certain to resent fiercely any charge made against Mdlle. Antaza, an Englishwoman and his wife's friend, and when he was officially angry he could be very terrible indeed. It was this thought which decided the Pasha at last. He could not face the Balio Bey in such a case, with the knowledge of a trumped-up slander on his conscience, and he felt shrewdly that in maintaining his position and carrying on his Government Sir Dugald's countenance and approval was of more vital consequence than his mother's. This he told her, as delicately as he could, and then quitted her presence, after a few vain attempts to soften her resentment, which was loud and voluble. Had he guessed what her next step would be, it is possible that he might have yielded abjectly even then, but he departed unconscious of what was in store for him in the immediate future.

It would, indeed, have taken a shrewd observer of human nature to forecast the Um-ul-Pasha's next move. Having failed to secure her end, she wasted no time in negotiations, but threw herself into the arms, figuratively speaking, of Jamileh Khanum, with whom she had been at daggers drawn ever since the young wife had entered the harem. Angry with her husband and jealous for her boy, Jamileh Khanum displayed no inclination to stand upon ceremony when she saw the prospect of gaining such a powerful ally, and the reconciliation was sealed over the sleeping form of little Najib Bey, upon whom his grandmother lavished all the vituperative epithets that occurred to her, for the purpose of averting the evil-eye. Before the evening of that day mother and grandmother had united in a league against Azim Bey. The son of the Hajar woman was to be displaced at any cost,

and before another day was over, M. Karalampi had been informed that his services were retained on behalf of this new claimant to the rights of Hussein Bey.

Unfortunately, from the ladies' point of view, the negotiations which had so nearly been crowned with success in the former case had been allowed entirely to fall through, and a change in the Padishah's *entourage* had removed the persons on whose help M. Karalampi had relied. It was necessary to begin the work all over again, and to set about it in a different way, but M. Karalampi still contrived to keep himself in the background, while all that the distracted Pasha knew was that his mother and his favourite wife were now bosom friends, and that this boded mischief to his elder son. He could act decisively enough, however, when the issue was a clear one, and he took his measures at once. Azim Bey should accompany him on the progress he was about to make through the country inhabited by the Kurdish tribes, in order to keep him out of harm's way, and Jamileh Khanum should come also, that she and the Um-ul-Pasha might not have the opportunity of weaving their plots together in his absence. The plan was no sooner decided upon than it was put into execution. As before, Cecil and Azim Bey, with their attendants, received orders to start first, spending a few days at Said Bey's house at Hillah, where the Pasha's great cavalcade would pick them up.

Cecil heard this news with dismay. It seemed to her that everything depended upon her being at Baghdad, in case Charlie really carried out his foolhardy plan, for if she saw him she might succeed in turning him back at the threshold of his adventure. But Lady Haigh, who knew that the last two summers in Baghdad had tried her very much, was delighted that this one should be

passed in the cooler atmosphere of the Kurdish uplands, and commended the Pasha's wisdom. Cecil said nothing to her of the reason she had for wishing to remain in the city. On the one side was the possibility of endangering Charlie by attracting attention to him should he really enter the country; on the other, the fear of lowering him in Sir Dugald's eyes by revealing the foolishness to which the Balio Bey would grant no quarter. In spite of his kindness, Cecil resented extremely the contemptuous light in which Sir Dugald continued to regard Charlie, and she was resolved not to give him the chance of thinking him more reckless than he was, in case he decided to forego his scheme.

"I suppose it isn't possible for a European traveller to come into the pashalik without your knowing it?" she said to Sir Dugald the evening before her departure, with a desire to make everything sure.

"Scarcely," said Sir Dugald. "They seem invariably to begin their wanderings by getting into trouble with the Turks, and then they write to me to help them out. No vice-consul will do for them, however near at hand—it must be the Consul-General or no one."

"But suppose they didn't wish to make themselves prominent, and managed not to get into trouble—in fact, came into the country quite quietly, and did their best to remain unnoticed?"

"Then I should hear of them rather sooner than in the other case," said Sir Dugald. "English travellers who didn't bluster or bully the natives would be such a phenomenon that both the Pasha and I should be simply inundated with full, true, and particular accounts of them. It would be evident to the Turkish mind that they were come for no good, and were probably either spies or on the look-out for hidden treasures."

"But if they were in disguise?" suggested Cecil, bringing forward reluctantly her true fear. Sir Dugald laughed heartily.

"That would be the quickest thing of all," he said. "An Englishman trying to pass for a native would be spotted immediately. I have known of several cases, and the people take a perverse delight in finding them out. In fact, it's an infallible means of proclaiming your nationality and attracting attention to pretend to be an oriental. If a man is such a fool as to try it, every person he meets becomes a spy on him at once. It's natural, of course, for they are afraid he might try to profane their holy places."

"And if you heard of any one who was trying to pass as a native, what would you do?" asked Cecil.

"Frighten him out of the country if possible, and if not have him here and reason him out," said Sir Dugald. "In his character as a native he couldn't venture to resist me, and if he dropped it he would be afraid of his life. I can't have irresponsible fools coming here and stirring up the fanatics to attempt outrages."

Cecil was a little comforted by the sense of Sir Dugald's power which this conversation gave her, and she left Baghdad cheered by the conviction that if Charlie did venture into Turkish Arabia, he would be obliged to quit it very quickly, and with no undue courtesy lavished upon him. In the absence of her own persuasive reasoning, she had considerable faith in Sir Dugald's certain use of *force majeure*, and he guessed the real source of her anxiety, and smiled grimly as he promised himself that her confidence in him should be fully justified if it was necessary.

At Hillah Naimeh Khanum received Cecil with open

arms. They had not met since Cecil's visit to the place in the summer of the riot, although Azim Bey had ridden over several times with his father for a short stay. In some way or other Naimeh Khanum had obtained an inkling of her brother's hatred for Charlie Egerton and its cause, and in the only long conversation she held with Cecil they talked the matter over. Naimeh Khanum had been speaking of Azim Bey's improvement in appearance and in health, and of the pleasure his progress in his studies gave to the Pasha, and Cecil in return confessed her disappointment with respect to the moral side of his nature.

"But what do you expect?" asked Naimeh Khanum. "Why should he sacrifice his own wishes for your pleasure? What is there in our religion to teach him to deny himself? He is a man, a true believer—what can the happiness of a woman, a Giaour, signify to him?"

"But one might hope," said Cecil, rather hesitatingly, "that some measure of Christian influence might reach him from all he has read, even without direct teaching."

Naimeh Khanum shook her head. "You forget the strength of the influences at work in the opposite direction," she said. "As it is, you have made my brother wiser, more polished, more European, but his character is unchanged. He will take all you can give him, and wear it like a cloak, covering his Eastern nature with it, but he will remain a Turk underneath all the same. His ideals, his views of women, are the same as my father's—they are not yours. You cannot Europeanise Turkey from the outside."

"And you, Khanum?" asked Cecil, "do you still feel as you did?"

"The same. I have read your book, and its words

are good words, but I have too much to give up. But I must not talk to you about this, mademoiselle. My husband found me reading the book, and he would have taken it away if I had not promised him never to speak about it to any one, especially to you. Ah, mademoiselle, if your people want to make us good and happy, they must teach the women as well as the men, and begin at the heart with both."

And Cecil could gain no more from her, the rather as they had very little time for private conversation. Azim Bey's lessons were going on just as if they were still at Baghdad, and Said Bey displayed a disposition to keep his wife from having much to say to the Frangi woman. Moreover, there were some English people at Hillah just now who had come out for the purpose of making excavations among the ruins of Babylon, and had spent much time in measuring and surveying once again the mighty mounds. The work of exploration, carried on throughout the pleasant spring days, was now over for the season, and Professor Howard White and his wife were about to leave Hillah before the summer heat came on, and to return to Baghdad preparatory to sailing for home, but for the moment their path crossed Cecil's on her way to the Kurdish hills.

Mrs Howard White had lived at Whitcliffe before her marriage, and had been a member of Mr Anstruther's congregation, and when on a visit to her family, just before starting for Babylonia, she had met Charlie at St Barnabas' Vicarage, and all these were reasons which made Cecil very desirous of seeing her. It seemed as though Azim Bey guessed this, for he hung about his governess persistently when Mrs Howard White came to call, and anything approach-

ing confidential talk was out of the question. But the professor's wife read rightly the entreaty in Cecil's eyes, and an invitation to tea on the last evening of their stay at Hillah gladdened the hearts of both pupil and governess. Azim Bey was eager to inspect Professor Howard White's instruments, of which he had heard wonderful tales from his brother-in-law, and Cecil, counting upon his insatiable curiosity to keep him safely in the study for a time, away from her, was tremblingly anxious for a little private conversation with her hostess. It was just possible that she might be able to set her heart at rest by assuring her that Charlie had given up his foolhardy plan. To know for certain that he was safely at home in England, absorbed in the repairs of his house and the business of his estate, Cecil felt that she would go through fire and water.

CHAPTER XXII.

A TRIUMPHAL PROCESSION.

MUCH as Cecil was troubled on Charlie's account, her worries were not all to be laid to his charge, for the near approach of the journey seemed to have unsettled Azim Bey, and during his last day of lessons he contrived to test his governess's patience sorely.

"I don't think we need do lessons to-day, mademoiselle," he said that morning.

"Why not?" said Cecil. "Come, Bey, here is this new book on Ethics. We will read it together, and I will set you questions on each chapter."

"I am lazy this morning, mademoiselle, I do not want to work. That *fête* yesterday was so unutterably tiresome that I went to sleep. I know I did, because the gold-lace on the sleeve of Said Bey's uniform left a mark upon my face. When I was there, I longed to be in this room reading, yet now that my desire is granted, I don't wish to read."

"There is not much use in reading only when you care to do it," said Cecil, severely. "It will be a useful mental discipline for you to do a good morning's work."

"Do you think that kind of discipline is good,

mademoiselle ?—doing things one does not like, I mean. Because, if it is, one ought to see that other people have plenty of it.”

“They will generally have plenty of it without your providing it for them,” said Cecil, sighing to think how much discipline of the kind her pupil had provided for her already. “You had much better try to make people happier, and leave such discipline alone, except in your own case.”

Azim Bey shook his head. “That would not suit me, mademoiselle. For me, I wish to make people better, and I consider myself peculiarly fitted to see that they undergo the necessary discipline.”

“I consider you peculiarly conceited,” said Cecil, “and I am afraid a great deal of mental discipline will be needed in your case, Bey. But we are wasting time in this discussion. Let us begin.”

Azim Bey took the book and settled down to a quarter of an hour's steady reading, then looked up, yawned, and showed a disposition to enter on an argument with regard to a point which he and Cecil had often discussed before. Cecil declined rather sharply to begin a fresh controversy, and her pupil returned to his book, only to leave it again in a minute or two. Thus things went on all the morning, affording practical proof that yesterday's dissipation had not agreed with Azim Bey; and it was the same in the afternoon, when it was time to go to the Howard Whites'. The house they had occupied was already beginning to look dismantled, but the little drawing-room in which the hostess received her guests was still gay with native embroideries and decorated with quaint pieces of pottery and odds and ends of Assyrian sculpture. The usual sitting-room, however, was the vine-shaded ter-

race, and here Mrs Howard White retired with Cecil, despatching Azim Bey to the study to enjoy himself.

But, unfortunately, Professor Howard White had been obliged to ride out to the mounds with Said Bey, on account of an accusation which had been brought against him of desecrating a native cemetery in their vicinity in the course of his observations, and Azim Bey, disdaining the services of the meek Syrian assistant who offered to show him the instruments, came and sat down on the terrace with Cecil and her hostess and interrupted their talk. It was impossible to speak of Charlie and of Whitcliffe in his presence, and an awkward silence, broken by spasmodic attempts at conversation, fell on the three. It was a relief when one of the servants appeared and told Mrs Howard White that there was a man selling European cutlery and needles in the courtyard, asking whether she would like to have him brought in.

"Oh, if you please, madame, let him come in," entreated Azim Bey, his usual vivacity returning. "Mademoiselle lost her scissors yesterday, and I have broken my knife, and I want a new one. May the pedlar come in?"

"Oh, certainly. Bring the man in, Habib," said Mrs Howard White to the servant, and she moved towards the verandah, where there was a table. Presently the pedlar entered, escorted in by two or three of the servants, and by an assistant of his own, who helped to carry his boxes. The two men were in Armenian costume, with high black caps, which marked them as coming from Persia, and they spoke Arabic with the peculiar Persian intonation. When their boxes were opened, the stock-in-trade displayed was so extensive that Azim Bey went into raptures, and his delight

even blinded him to the combination of the two obnoxious nationalities, the hated Persian and the despised Armenian, in the persons of the traders. Not less attracted were Um Yusuf and the rest of the women, and while Azim Bey chatted eagerly to the pedlar's servant over the array of pocket-knives, they gathered round the other box and coveted endless pairs of scissors.

"See, mademoiselle," said Um Yusuf, taking up a fanciful little needlecase in the shape of a butterfly, "this is a pretty thing. Why not Azim Bey buy it for Basmeleh Kalfa? Look, it open, like this."

"Stay, O my mistress," interrupted the pedlar; "why shouldst thou spoil my wares? Let thy lady hold it, and I will show her how to open it."

Um Yusuf put the case into Cecil's hands, and the vendor raised the flap to show the needles inside. As he did so, his hands met Cecil's with a peculiar pressure. Startled, she looked into his eyes, and in spite of dyed skin, shaven hair and moustache, recognised Charlie in the Armenian pedlar. The shock was overpowering, and she dropped helplessly on the divan, too much astonished even to cry out. A deadly faintness was stealing over her, the figures around seemed to be whirling in a rainbow-coloured mist, but two words from Charlie brought her back to her senses.

"Don't faint," he said, sternly, yet in such a low voice that she alone heard it, and she recalled her wandering wits and rose slowly from the seat where she had sunk down. With trembling hands she turned over the pedlar's stock, and commented on it with lips quivering with agitation. It was a tremendous effort, but she was nerved to it by the sound of Azim Bey's voice at the other end of the verandah.

"You see I remembered what you said, and came as a Christian this time," said Charlie, in a hurried whisper, while he held up a pair of scissors for her inspection. Cecil gave him a look of agony. She dared not speak to him, dared not even let him touch her hand again, and it was misery that they should be so close and yet so widely separated. It was almost a relief when Azim Bey came to complete his purchases by buying a pair of scissors for old Ayesha, for even Charlie would not venture to address her when her pupil was so near. Again the thought of his danger made her turn sick and faint, and she sat down on the divan and listened to the details of the bargaining as though in a dream. At last Azim Bey had chosen all he wanted, the money was paid down, and Mrs Howard White told the servant to show the pedlar out. Cecil breathed freely once more. She had not heard the words which Azim Bey whispered to the negro lad who was officially known as his slipper-bearer.

"Keep those men in sight, and bring me word of whatever they do. If they leave the town without my hearing of it, it shall be upon thy head."

"Upon my head be it, O my lord," said the boy, and departed; while Cecil, unsuspecting, though sick at heart and racked with anxiety, accompanied her pupil back to the house of Said Bey.

"O, my mistress, here is the Christian pedlar again," said Habib to Mrs Howard White early the next morning.

"Bring him in," said the lady, with evident displeasure; and as soon as the order had been obeyed, and Habib was gone, she turned on Charlie.

"Well, Dr Egerton, I hope you are satisfied. You

have given poor Miss Anstruther a terrible fright, and probably made her miserable for weeks; and you ought to be now on your way to Baghdad, where, you assured me, you would go as soon as you had caught a glimpse of her."

"But I am not going to Baghdad," said Charlie.

"Then I shall simply write to Sir Dugald Haigh and tell him everything," said Mrs Howard White, angrily.

"Listen to me a moment," said Charlie. "I was fully intending to start at sunrise this very morning; but last night I was talking to some of Said Bey's servants, and I hear that the Pasha is to be accompanied on this journey by Karalampi, the Greek of whom I have told you. I cannot, and will not, leave Miss Anstruther exposed to his machinations."

"This is absurd," said Mrs Howard White. "Miss Anstruther has succeeded in taking very good care of herself since you left Baghdad, and I should say that she was quite able to do so still. I call it arrant selfishness to keep her tormented with anxiety about you by following the Pasha's camp, where you can do no good, and may get yourself and her into great trouble. As for saying that it is done on her account, you know that it is simply for an adventure—a lark."

"It isn't really, on my word of honour," said Charlie, quickly. "I promise you, Mrs Howard White, Cecil shan't see anything of me, and, unless she is in danger, shall never even know that I am near her. I have got permission to follow the Pasha's caravan—it is quite natural; lots of traders and people are going to do it—for the sake of protection through the mountains, and I shall be among the riffraff at the very end of the procession, while she is among the grandees in front. She will never even hear of me."

"Then what good can you do?" asked Mrs Howard White.

"I don't know—just be near in case she needs help, I suppose."

"You are a very foolish young man," said the lady, with severity; "and why you should want to help her when she doesn't need any help, I don't know. I suppose you will go, since you are set upon it; but remember that I disapprove entirely of the whole thing, and that I would never have helped you to meet her here if I had guessed what you would do."

Charlie laughed, and took leave of his hostess to prepare his mules for the journey, all unconscious of the fact that at that moment he was the subject of a conversation between Azim Bey and M. Karalampi—the latter having just arrived in the train of the Pasha.

"I tell you, monsieur, he is here!" cried the boy in a frenzy. "I saw him myself, and mademoiselle recognised him. He and his servant are disguised as Armenians from Julfa, and they are selling knives and scissors. I have set the boy Ishak to watch them, and he tells me that they have gained permission to attach themselves to our caravan, in traversing the mountains."

"Ah! With the knowledge of mademoiselle?" asked M. Karalampi.

"No; I am convinced she knows nothing of this. I believe she imagines that he is returning at once to Baghdad."

"So much the better. And what are your wishes, Bey Effendi?"

"I should like," said Azim Bey, slowly, as though gloating over each word—"I should like him to be

carried off secretly and kept a prisoner until after mademoiselle's five years here are over, and she has entered into a new agreement to remain. If she heard nothing of him, she might forget him and be willing to stay with us."

"Excellent, Bey Effendi! May I suggest that this time Dr Egerton should not be intrusted to your friends the Hajar, with whose language and customs he is well acquainted? If I am right, you do not wish that this imprisonment should be made too pleasant for him. You desire something more than mere safe-keeping?"

Azim Bey nodded. M. Karalampi went on, watching his face keenly.

"The Kurds would suit your purpose much better, Bey Effendi. They have hiding-places and strongholds in the hills which the Padishah's whole army could not discover, and they do not love Christians. They might be relied upon to keep Dr Egerton so safely that even the Balio Bey should never hear of him."

"That is what I want," cried Azim Bey, eagerly. "Let him disappear, and not be heard of until he is wanted, which will not be for a very long time."

"And you do not wish to make any stipulation as to the treatment he is to receive, Bey Effendi? The Kurds may make a slave of him if they like?"

"Anything, so long as they keep him safely," said Azim Bey.

M. Karalampi went away well pleased. The news he had just heard, and his conversation with Azim Bey, had opened up vistas of endless possibilities of revenge on several of the people against whom he cherished grudges, besides affording a prospect of gratifying the wishes of the Um-ul-Pasha and Jamileh Khanum. As

for Azim Bey, he returned to his governess with a quiet mind. He had put matters in train, and left them in the charge of a safe person, and was able to enjoy the spectacle of Cecil's anxiety. In all the bustle of starting on their further journey, her mind was occupied with other matters than boxes and bundles. She could not rid herself of the haunting impression of Charlie's fatal imprudence. How could he risk death in this way just for the sake of seeing her? It was foolish, it was criminal. If only she could have some assurance that he was safely on his way to Baghdad before Azim Bey's suspicions were roused! What was to be done? Could she send Um Yusuf out to make inquiries about him, and to warn him, if he were still in Hillah, to leave at once? No; such a step could only serve to awaken suspicion. There was nothing to be done but to try and let everything take its usual course. In this belief, she nerved herself to give due attention to her packing, and at last to don her blue wrapper and mount her mule, although she felt as though she could not leave the place while Charlie might still be in it. The appearance of an Armenian, as they passed through the town, made her start and tremble, but nowhere did her eyes light upon the face which was now so strange and yet so familiar. She did her best to assure herself that this showed that Charlie had safely departed, never guessing that among the miscellaneous throng that closed the Pasha's long procession were the two Armenians from Julfa with their mules and their packs, watched closely by little Ishak.

The march went on, and still Cecil heard and saw nothing. Across the desert, up the lower hills, over the sandy tablelands, wound the long cavalcade, headed

by banners and guards, kettledrums and led horses, and escorted by bands of irregular horsemen belonging to the tribes whose country was traversed. From pleasant villages in fertile valleys the people came forth with professions of obedience to the Pasha, and gifts of provisions for his followers. They were a much finer set of men than the inhabitants of the plains, strapping Kurds in pink and black striped garments and preposterous turbans, and sturdy Nestorian Christians in pointed felt caps, the women nearly all well-dressed, and often very beautiful. At night a site for the camp was chosen close to some village, and the richer inhabitants gave up their houses to the Pasha and his immediate following, while the motley crowd of hangers-on bivouacked outside. The journey through these districts was very pleasant, but it did not last long. The lower hills, with their orchards and vineyards, their rose-thickets and fruit-gardens, were soon left behind, and the way now lay through the mountains, dark and steep and rugged, which form the outermost of the natural fortifications of Kurdistan.

The Pasha's tour was not intended solely as a pleasure-trip. It was meant to combine with this the functions of a triumphal march, for in the district which was now to be traversed there had lately been "troubles," both with the Kurds and the Yezidis, and the Pasha was making this progress as a kind of outward sign of the restoration of order, now that the Mutesalim or lieutenant-governor had put down the disturbances by force. The Mutesalim came to meet his overlord on the borders of his district, bringing with him a large body of troops, and the march through the newly pacified regions began. The Mutesalim was not altogether happy in his mind, for he was conscious

that his own exactions and bad treatment of the people, Moslems and Christians alike (to ill-treat the heathen, as the Yezidis were called, was a matter of course), had caused the disturbances. He was further afraid that they might prove not to have entirely ceased even now, when, by his glowing reports of the successes he had won, and the peaceful and prosperous state of the country, he had, quite unintentionally, tempted the Pasha into paying it a visit. His uneasiness was only too well grounded. As soon as the caravan was once embarked on the difficult mountain-paths, it began to be beset by bands of Yezidis, the survivors of the communities which the Mutesalim had broken up. He had carried off the children as slaves and murdered all the adults he could find, but the young and active men had escaped into the fastnesses of the hills, and were preparing a welcome for their oppressor. With them were a few Kurds, whose wrath against the Mutesalim had been sufficiently strong to join them with the devil-worshippers in opposing him, and they followed out a policy of harassing the caravan constantly at inconvenient times. They beset it in difficult places, and were gone before the troops could be brought up, and they kept up continual alarms in the night, organising a series of small surprises on the outskirts of the camp. It was very evident that the disturbances had not been put down, and the Pasha represented this to the Mutesalim in forcible language. It was plain that he was absolutely incapable, and insolent as well, since he had brought his Excellency out from Baghdad to see a conquered country which was not conquered at all, and the only thing to be done was for the Pasha himself to take the business seriously in hand.

When this decision became known, there was loud lamentation and great dismay in the harem. It was one thing to come on a pleasure-trip, and quite another to find it turned into a military promenade through a country swarming with enemies. It was not reassuring to hear, on camping for the night, that the mountaineers had swept off into slavery during the march some twenty of the non-combatants in the rear, nor to find in the morning that two or three guards had been murdered in the darkness close to one's tent. Nor was it pleasant, in the course of the day, just when a particularly nasty place in a steep descending path had been reached, with a precipice on one side and a perpendicular wall of rock on the other, to be assailed suddenly by tremendous stones, which came crashing down across the path, frightening the mules and almost unseating their riders, while a brisk fusilade from the summit of the cliffs showed that it was no avalanche which thus interrupted the march, and caused the ladies to scream frantically to the guards and soldiers to save them and take them out of this horrible place. To do the soldiers justice, they were no more anxious for the ladies' presence at such a juncture than they were themselves, declaring that what with the rocks crashing down, the mules capering, and the women screaming, it was impossible to take aim or to do anything quietly. Under these circumstances the Pasha thought it advisable to bestow his household in some safe place before beginning military operations in earnest, and the caravan moved on as fast as possible towards the fort and town of Sardiyeh, the seat of the Mutesalim's government, where Jamileh Khanum, with her attendants, was to be left under a strong guard.

The Mutesalim was to accompany his Excellency into

the field, to see how a little war of this kind ought to be conducted, with the prospect of almost certain disgrace and probable death if any disaster occurred to the Pasha's arms, or any mishap ruffled the Pasha's temper. Although in the course of his eventful life Ahmed Khémi had been under fire more than once, he was not a soldier, and the Mutesalim thought the outlook sufficiently dreary to send on a message to his household telling them to leave Sardiyeh and go into hiding before the Pasha's arrival, that they might not be exposed to his vengeance. When the arrival of the caravan at the fort disclosed the fact that the ladies' apartments were untenanted, the Mutesalim explained that he had sent away his family in order that there might be more room for his Excellency's household, and the Pasha was graciously pleased to accept the excuse. The rooms vacated proved, however, insufficient to meet the needs of the party, and for Cecil and her pupil, with their attendants, accommodation was found in the best house in the little town by the simple process of turning the inhabitants out to make room for them. Whether the rightful owners quartered themselves in turn upon their neighbours, or whether they retired to the stables or the kitchen, Cecil could not discover, but she was inexpressibly thankful to have once more a little domain which she could call her own.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE END OF EVERYTHING.

THE journey through the upland country had not been at all a pleasant one to Cecil, quite irrespective of the continual alarms due to the attacks of the insurgents. From the very day on which they left Hillah, Jamileh Khanum's behaviour had become markedly and inexplicably disagreeable. She seized every opportunity of heaping slights on Azim Bey and his governess, and her servants followed her example. Travelling, as they did, humbly in the rear of the harem procession, which was headed by the gorgeous *takhtrevan*, with its velvet cushions and curtains of cloth-of-gold, in which reposed the Khanum Effendi and her boy, the little band who formed the household of Azim Bey were exposed to many unpleasantnesses. It became almost a matter of course that Cecil should find, on reaching the village where the night was to be spent, that the Khanum Effendi and her household had appropriated all the accommodation, leaving her and her party no choice but to camp in the courtyard. She herself would have been willing to sacrifice much for the sake of peace, but Azim Bey was by no means like-minded, and the difficulty was generally settled by a tremendous quarrel

between the respective servants, in the course of which Masûd, armed with a whip and his young master's authority, turned out the intruders in sufficient numbers to secure Cecil and the other women a resting-place where they would be tolerably free from the attacks of the mosquitoes and other pests of the region.

Disagreeable as these nightly experiences were, they did not at all exhaust Jamileh Khanum's opportunities of making herself unpleasant. It seemed to Cecil that she was doing her best, with a purposeless malignity, to lower both Azim Bey and his governess in the eyes of the servants. Not feeling inclined to assist in this process, Cecil did her best to keep her followers separate from the rest; but Jamileh Khanum could never pass the group without an insulting word to her, or an expression of hatred directed against Azim Bey, who was stigmatised twenty times a day as the supplanter of his little brother. Cecil's patience was sorely tasked, for it was a difficult business to maintain her own dignity without infringing the respect due to the Khanum Effendi, and there was no redress. Once on the journey, the Pasha was scarcely ever to be seen, even by Azim Bey; for custom required that the gentlemen should all ride at a considerable distance in front of the harem procession, and for Cecil to have left her companions to lay her grievances before her employer would have been a breach of etiquette amounting to a crime. One of the most disagreeable features of the case was that Jamileh Khanum's servants imitated their mistress's behaviour, and even improved upon it. Azim Bey could always take care of himself, and Cecil had spirit enough to secure tolerable respect towards her in her presence, but the treatment which

their household received from that of Jamileh Khanum was galling in the extreme. Headed by the Levantine Mdle. Katrina, who had been lent to her daughter-in-law by the Um-ul-Pasha in view of this journey, the harem attendants did everything in their power to insult and injure the servants of the Bey.

What reason there could be for this state of affairs Cecil could not conceive, until it struck her one day, from various signs which she observed, that her slighted admirer, M. Karalampi, was in communication with Jamileh Khanum. As had been the case at Baghdad, the go-between was Mdle. Katrina. It was of course impossible for her to have any actual intercourse with M. Karalampi, who was in front with the Pasha; but Mdle. Katrina had a nephew, an ill-conditioned youth of mixed parentage and doubtful nationality, who was continually to be seen hanging about in the neighbourhood of the harem tents. Once or twice Cecil came upon this individual talking to his aunt in secluded corners, a thing which could not have happened if the agas had not diplomatically turned their backs; but it seemed ridiculous to suppose that M. Karalampi's schemes could be in any way forwarded by the petty persecution which had been set on foot, and she thought little of the matter. It was Um Yusuf who first let her into the secret of the mortifications she had endured, but this was not until Sardiyyeh was reached, and they were safe in their own house, and as free from insult as in their courtyard at Baghdad.

"Come down the hill with me, Um Yusuf,—I want to make a sketch," Cecil said to her maid the morning after their arrival, entranced by the effects of light and shade produced by the sunrise upon the dark mountains.

"You not go beyond the gate, mademoiselle?" asked Um Yusuf, anxiously.

"Why not?" asked Cecil, in astonishment. "There is a place just outside the town-wall which has a splendid view. We will take little Ishak to carry the paint-box, and we shall be in sight of the guard at the gate. Besides, the Kurds would not venture so near to the town."

"Mademoiselle," said Um Yusuf, slowly and impressively, "you not go one step outside gate without Masûd. Suppose guard looking the other way; Kurds or any bad men come up quickly, kill you, kill me, run away. What good guard do?"

"But why should the Kurds be lying in wait for us?" asked Cecil, laughing.

"I said Kurds *or any bad men*, mademoiselle."

"What do you mean, Um Yusuf?" asked Cecil, impressed by the woman's tone. "Is there any one who wants to kill us?"

"I tell you what I know," said Um Yusuf, looking fearfully round the house-top, where they were standing. "Khanum Effendi want get you away from Azim Bey, mademoiselle. All this time she been rude to you, and her servants the same, but when you not there they say to Basmeh Kalfa, to Masûd, to me, 'You see your Mdle. Antaza? What she signify here? Khanum Effendi do what she like with her. Balio Bey big man, but his arm not reach to Kurdistan. You help Khanum Effendi get rid of her, you not be punished, get plenty of money. You say she want poison Azim Bey, Pasha send her away, all right for you.' That what they say to us, mademoiselle, we say no, tell Pasha if they do it again. They laugh at us, but not try it, and I think they kill you if they can."

Cecil turned pale. It was a horrible thing to feel that her enemies had tried to bribe her own servants to bear false witness against her, and to know that she owed her life to their faithfulness. Their safety as well as her own was now at stake, and she did not need another warning from Um Yusuf. She kept her pupil with her all day, and did not attempt to go out unless escorted by Masûd. It did not occur to her to take further precautions, and she did not know until some time afterwards that Um Yusuf, fearing poison, made a practice of tasting beforehand every dish which was to be set before her mistress. All the food used by the household was purchased separately in the market by Basmeh Kalfa, and none of the harem slaves were allowed to come near the kitchen. These measures once taken, Um Yusuf felt that things were tolerably safe, not knowing that Jamileh Khanum's messengers had conveyed to M. Karalampi the news of the failure to corrupt the members of the household, and also of the precautions which had been adopted, and that the answer returned was that he had a new plan for effecting the desired purpose just ready to be put in action.

It afforded a partial relief to Cecil's anxiety for her pupil when he was allowed, in answer to his piteous prayers, to accompany his father and the troops part of the way in their march against the chief stronghold of the insurgents. He was away for some days, and his governess employed the time in writing one of the long journal letters which kept the family at Whitcliffe regularly informed of all her doings under ordinary circumstances, but had been neglected during the exciting times of the last few weeks, which were unfavourable to epistolary composition. But it was still difficult to write, for Cecil did not dare to say a word on the

subject which lay nearest her heart—that of Charlie's present whereabouts. The alarm she had felt on his account in leaving Hillah had increased tenfold now that a considerable time had elapsed without her hearing from him, and it was in vain that she tried to comfort herself with the suggestion that the insurgents might have prevented the passage of any couriers, or that his letters might have been intercepted once more. She felt sure that if he had reached Baghdad, he would not have failed to send her some intimation of his safety through Sir Dugald, with whose letters neither Azim Bey nor the mountaineers, who cherished a deep veneration for the British name, would venture to meddle. It was evident, then, that Charlie was either still in Hillah, or was retracing his steps to Ispahan by the way he had come—if, at least, he had not been suspected and seized.

The thought of this last possibility tormented Cecil day and night, and the more so that no means of solving the mystery presented themselves to her. Even if she wrote to Sir Dugald to inform him of her meeting with Charlie and of her fears respecting his safety, and inquiries were set on foot, it might have just the effect of arousing suspicion, and endangering him in his journey back to Persia or his retirement at Hillah, supposing that he had settled down there to enjoy a taste of Eastern life once more. Cecil longed wearily for some assurance that this was the case, and wished too late that she had not set her face so resolutely against her lover's eccentricities in the past. Merely to know now that he was safe in the camp of some sheikh of the Hajar would have been the height of bliss, but it was a bliss she was not to enjoy.

To write her letter under these circumstances, without

alluding to the subject which filled almost all her waking thoughts, was a difficult task, but she feared that the epistle might fall into unfriendly hands, and she wrote it without even mentioning Charlie's name. The recital of the alarms and moving incidents which had diversified the passage of the caravan through the mountains took her so long that she did not finish the letter until the afternoon of the day on which Azim Bey was expected back, and she gave a sigh of gratification as she wrapped the envelope in the strong paper covering which was necessary to protect it against the rough usage it would probably meet with in its transit to Baghdad. This operation completed, and the packet firmly sealed, she went out on the broad *lewan* or piazza to call one of the servants, who might give it to the Pasha's courier before he started on his journey to the city.

Looking down into the courtyard, without the slightest foreboding of coming trouble, she saw that the servants had a visitor. Um Yusuf, old Ayesha, and Basmeh Kalfa were sitting on the ground, entertaining with coffee and cakes an elderly woman in whom Cecil recognised a former *kalfa* of the Um-ul-Pasha's, who had married a non-commissioned officer of one of the regiments which formed the guard of honour, and who had been permitted to accompany her husband on this expedition. But the cakes stood untasted, and Basmeh Kalfa had paused in the act of pouring out the coffee, and was holding the pot suspended in the air, while she and the others stared with eyes of horror at their visitor, and listened with upraised hands of dismay to some story which she seemed to be narrating.

"May God visit it upon my own head if it be not true!" concluded the stranger, and Cecil heard Um

Yusuf apostrophising a string of obscure Syrian saints, while the two other women murmured, "God forbid!" and "God is great!" in awestruck tones.

"How wilt thou tell thy lady, O Um Yusuf?" asked old Ayesha, just as Um Yusuf looked up, met her mistress's eye, and dropped in her consternation the cup she was holding. A feeling for which she could not account impelled Cecil to descend the steps leading into the court and enter the group, the members of which started guiltily when they found her among them, the visitor alone taking refuge in an assumed carelessness.

"Is anything wrong? What is the matter?" Cecil asked.

"Oh, nothing, mademoiselle," replied Um Yusuf, hastily. "You want me?"

"I am sure there is something wrong," said Cecil. "Latifeh Kalfa has brought bad news. What is it that you are to tell me, Um Yusuf?"

"You come with me, mademoiselle," said Um Yusuf, trying to draw her mistress aside. "That daughter of Shaitan know nothing—she make it all up."

"God forbid!" said Latifeh Kalfa, piously.

"O my soul, come with me!" entreated Um Yusuf.

"I insist upon hearing what she has told you," said Cecil, standing her ground, although the affectionate epithet from the lips of the sedate Syrian woman thrilled her with alarm.

"She say, mademoiselle," said Um Yusuf, unwillingly, "that those two Armenians from Hillah were with Pasha's caravan in the mountains, and Kurds carry them off."

"Is this true?" demanded Cecil of Latifeh Kalfa.

"I heard it from my husband, who was with the rear-guard, O my lady," replied the woman; "and more than

that, I can testify that though I had often seen them before, yet they disappeared altogether from that time."

"But was it Kurds, not Yezidis?" asked Cecil.

"Kurds, O my lady," purred the woman. She had a soft, smooth voice, and a way of fastening her eyes sleepily on the person she addressed. Cecil, standing for a moment overwhelmed, felt an unreasoning hatred spring up in her heart against her. It was only for the first instant that the disaster crushed her, however, and she sought immediate relief in action.

"I want you to come out with me, Um Yusuf," she said.

"But, mademoiselle, Masûd not here. You not go without him?"

"Yes, I can't wait."

"But they kill us, mademoiselle."

"Then stay behind and I will go alone. Don't you see that there is not a moment to lose?"

"If I perish, I perish," was Um Yusuf's mental utterance as she wrapped her sheet round her and followed her mistress without another word. She would face all the Kurds in Kurdistan rather than let mademoiselle go out by herself.

"Where you going, mademoiselle?" she asked, as they approached the gate.

"To the little Christian village down in the valley," responded Cecil, steadily. "The priest there will help us. He can speak English."

"What! Kasha Thoma?" asked Um Yusuf. "Oh yes, he good man, been with Melican missionaries at Beyrout. But what you say to him, mademoiselle?"

"I shall ask him to send off a trustworthy messenger at once to Baghdad, to tell the Balio Bey what we have heard. If the Pasha were here, I would go straight to

"What you 'fraid of, mademoiselle?" inquired Um Yusuf.

"That the Kurds may carry Dr Egerton away into the mountains, or take him to Persia, and perhaps treat him badly," said Cecil.

Um Yusuf's own fears were of a darker nature, but she was wise enough to keep silence concerning them, and presently her mind became engrossed with the thought of the peril into which she and her mistress were running by leaving the town unattended. True, almost every foot of the winding path which led to the Nestorian village was under the eye of the watchman at the town-gate, and also of the Turkish sentinels at the fort, but the untoward events of the journey, and the alarms of the last few weeks, would have shaken the nerves of most people, and Um Yusuf's imagination conjured up lurking Kurds behind every rock. More than once she was on the point of declaring her conviction that Latifeh Kalfa's whole story was a fraud, invented for the very purpose of decoying Cecil out in this way, that she might fall into the hands of the Kurdish raiders; but the certainty that, even if she turned back, her mistress would infallibly go on alone, kept her silent, and she followed on in the spirit of a martyr, casting timid glances on either side. Fervently she longed for the protection of Mas'ud and his stout *çaldgel*, but neither was at hand. Her greatest trial was still to come, for at the foot of the hill a man rose suddenly from the shelter of a clump of bushes and ran towards them. Um Yusuf screamed and clutched Cecil's arm.

"It is only a beggar," said Cecil, quickly; and indeed the shrunken form in its multi-coloured rags could scarcely have been considered formidable in any case. As he reached them the man tore off the *kaffiyeh* which

enveloped his head, disclosing a face at sight of which both women started and turned pale. The wasted features were those of Hanna, the Armenian lad who had been Charlie Egerton's servant at Baghdad, and had accompanied him on his foolhardy adventure.

"O luckless one!" screamed Um Yusuf, finding her tongue first, "what evil fate has befallen thee? Where is thy master?"

"What is that to do with thee?" demanded Hanna. "I am here with a message from him to thy lady."

"Tell me quickly," cried Cecil, "is he ill? in prison?"

"He had no time to write," pursued Hanna, evasively, "but I have carried his words."

"But is he—is he——" gasped Cecil. "He is not dead?"

"O my lady, he is dead. I am come unto thee with the last words he said."

"Go on," said Cecil, hoarsely, her tearless eyes searching the man's face.

"I can tell thee but little, O my lady, for all was done so quickly. My master and I left Hillah with our mules in the train of the Pasha, desiring to pass through the mountains in safety. But on a certain day there was an attack made upon the rear-guard, and the robbers succeeded in getting between it and the main body. There was a great turmoil, for all the traders and their beasts were mixed up with the soldiers and the enemy upon a narrow ledge of rock, and in the confusion a band of Kurds separated some of us from the rest, and dragged us away by force. Among these were my master and I, for he had bidden me keep close beside him. Then they bound our hands and fastened us to their saddles, and led us along many steep and winding paths, going continually

farther into the mountains. But my master said, 'Courage, Hanna! don't lose heart. We will yet slip away from them,' and I was cheered, knowing his coolness and bravery. But at last they left the horses behind, and began to climb up rocks such as the wild goats love, still leading my master and me with them. So then we came to a valley in the highest part of the mountains, in which there was a pool of water and some sheep, and when my master saw the place, he said, 'Our wanderings are over, O Hanna, for they would never have shown us this stronghold of theirs had they meant us to leave it alive.' Now in this valley were caves, and into one of these they thrust my master and me, leaving us without food or water for two days and nights. But on the third day one of the Kurds in passing called out to us between the stones at the mouth of the cave, 'Dogs of Christians, prepare for death!' Then while my master and I looked at one another, the rest came and took down the stones and led my master away. But as he went he turned and said to me, 'If thou shouldst escape, seek out Mdle. Antaza, and say this to her from me'—and truly, O my lady, I have repeated it night and morning on my fingers, lest I should forget it, for it was seven English words"—and spreading out his hand, Hanna read off mechanically, "'Good—bye—dar—ling—God—bless—you.'"

A choking sob burst from Cecil, but she signed to the man to continue.

"That was the last time I saw my master alive, O my lady. But that evening they led me forth also, and I thought that surely my hour of death was come, but they took me only to the brow of a precipice, and told me to look down. And looking down, I saw——"

"What?" asked Cecil, sharply.

"I saw my master's body lying far below, in the Armenian dress he had worn, in a pit as deep as Jehannam. And the robbers laughed at me, and bade me mark the place well, saying, 'Thy master's turn to-day, thine to-morrow.' Then they led me back, more dead than alive with fear; but behold! before we reached the cave we found coming to meet us certain other Kurds, who had only just arrived in the stronghold, and those with me stopped to salute them and to ask them of their welfare. And after welcoming them they killed a sheep and made a feast, leaving me in the cave, but with no stone at its mouth. And when they were eating and were merry, and it was dark and no guard set, I crept out, and finding the sword of a man who had thrown it aside while he ate, I cut through my bonds. Then, taking the sword with me, and some bread that lay near, I stole away, and when I was out of earshot of the Kurds, I started to run. But how I found the way down the mountain, or how I did not fall and die, I cannot tell; I know only that I made my way hither, and for three days have I watched for thee, O my lady, to give thee the message of the dead. But into the town I could not come, for the watchman at the gate drove me away."

"And what wilt thou do now?" asked Um Yusuf.

"I should wish to return to Baghdad and my own people," he said; "but how am I to go there, when my master is dead, and the Kurds have robbed me?"

"Go to Baghdad," said Cecil, emptying her purse mechanically into his hands, "and tell the Balio Bey what you have told me. Don't lose time—but no, there is no need of any hurry now. Let us go back to Sardiyeh, Um Yusuf. Kasha Thoma cannot help us."

CHAPTER XXIV.

PRISONERS.

THEY retraced their steps up the rugged hill-path, Cecil first, Um Yusuf following her, and went in at the gate, climbing the steep rock-hewn lanes of the little town in silence. At their house-door Masûd was lounging in his accustomed place, and started up in astonishment on seeing them approaching from the street.

"This is not well, O my lady," he said to Cecil, with an air of respectful remonstrance which would have amused her at any other time. "Does my lady wish to bring wrath upon her servant's head from the Bey Effendi, that she goes out without summoning him to attend upon her?"

"Hold thy peace, foolish one!" cried Um Yusuf, as Cecil turned and stared at him with unseeing eyes. "Is my lady to be taken to task by thy insolent tongue? Let her pass, or I will complain to the Bey Effendi of thy rudeness."

Sorely perplexed, Masûd yielded the point, and opened the gate for them. Ayesha and the other women were looking out curiously from the doorway of their room, but on catching sight of Cecil they drew back, and she passed on with bowed head. Mounting the steps of the

Levan, she entered her own room, and dropped on the divan with a wordless moan. At present she did not in the least realise the full horror of the news she had heard; she only knew that a sudden blow had fallen upon her, blotting out all recollection and deadening every feeling. All night she lay where she had sunk down, deaf to Um Yusuf's remonstrances and entreaties; and when she allowed herself to be raised from the divan in the morning, it was only to return to it again, leaving her breakfast untasted, and to sit crouched in a corner, staring before her with stony eyes. In vain Um Yusuf pleaded and entreated; her mistress did not even seem to hear her, and noticed her presence as little as she did that of the other women, who crowded round the door of her room, looking pityingly at her. They had no idea of the instinctive desire for solitude of one in deep grief; their notion of showing sympathy was to assemble together and discuss all the circumstances of the case in the mourner's hearing, and Um Yusuf was too much harassed, too anxious for help and advice, to drive them away, as she would ordinarily have done. That *Mdlle. Antaza* had gone mad was the general opinion, and this was confirmed by the fact that she took no notice of the intruders, and seemed neither to see nor hear them. Um Yusuf was at her wits' end. She knew no more of mental pathology than she did of comparative anatomy, but she had the help of long experience to guide her, and she knew that this deadly calm must be broken.

At last, as the readiest means of effecting this, she went in search of Azim Bey. He had only just returned, a day later than he was expected, and was hearing from Masûd all that the worthy aga could tell him of what had happened. To say that he was

appalled is only faintly to describe his feelings. He had often wished Charlie out of the way, and it is not improbable that he would have been deeply grateful for any fatal accident or illness which had removed him from mademoiselle's path. But that Dr Egerton should be murdered in cold blood, and that, too, as a direct consequence of the arrangement he had made with M. Karalampi, was a very different thing. He shrank back and shivered at the thought of meeting Cecil, but Um Yusuf would take no denial, and fairly led him back to the sitting-room. Her stony silence and the reproachful glances of the other women were sufficient to make a deep impression even on his hardened young heart; but when he saw Cecil crouched on the divan, her eyes fixed, her hands hanging idle, he would have fled if he could. Um Yusuf, expecting such an attempt, pushed him into the room, and as he entered it timidly, Cecil looked up and met his gaze, then turned away with a shuddering sigh. He could not bear it.

"Oh, mademoiselle," he cried, rushing to her, regardless of the shiver of repulsion with which she drew herself away from him, "forgive me!"

"Then it was your fault," said Cecil, slowly. "You had him killed."

"No, mademoiselle, not that—not that! Oh, my dear mademoiselle, I have been very wicked, very unkind, but I never wanted him killed. I wished him to be kept safely, where you would not see him, until the time came for you to leave us, that I might try to make you stay with me, and then he was to be set free; but what I wanted was never this—never this, mademoiselle," and he flung himself sobbing at her feet and kissed the hem of her dress.

"Tell me, Bey," said Cecil, laying a hand on his shoulder, and speaking in the same restrained tones, "can you say truly that you had no hand in his death?"

"None, mademoiselle, none!" sobbed Azim Bey. "It is my fault, for I hated him, and wished him to be carried off by the Kurds, but I never wanted him dead, and I would give all I have to bring him back to life now. Oh, mademoiselle, only forgive me, and we will avenge his death a thousand times over. I will speak to my father of these wretches who have murdered Dr Egerton, and they shall give a life for every drop of his blood. They shall be swept from the face of the earth, and their wives and children and all belonging to them, and their houses shall be made a desolation for ever. And as for M. Karalampi, that Shaitan, he shall be——"

"Oh, hush, Bey," said Cecil, shuddering; "I don't want vengeance. How can you suggest it? These men have only understood your orders a little too well. And how could it comfort me to know that innocent women and children were punished for the fault of the men?—it would make my grief ten times greater. But oh, Bey, remember," and her voice was choked, "that a life once taken can never be restored."

She broke down and sobbed passionately, while Azim Bey knelt at her feet, entreating her forgiveness again and again. He would not leave her until Um Yusuf laid a strong hand on his shoulder and dragged him away, telling him that he would make mademoiselle ill. Even then he broke away from her grasp at the door and rushed back, with a piteous entreaty that Cecil would say she forgave him; but she was too much overcome with the violence of her grief to answer, and

he went away sorrowful. Um Yusuf was better pleased, for her plan had succeeded. She had made her mistress shed tears at last, and she waited until she was exhausted with weeping and then coaxed her to go to bed. Sheer bodily fatigue made her sleep, and she awoke the next day in a more normal condition. It was characteristic of her that when once the haunting consciousness of overshadowing trouble which oppressed her on waking had resolved itself into the terrible knowledge that her world was from henceforth bereft of Charlie, her next thought was that the ordinary duties of the day must still be fulfilled, and she set herself mechanically to dress as usual, and went out on the *lewan* to seek her pupil. He was there, wandering aimlessly and miserably about, and came timidly to kiss her hand, with evident fear and reluctance.

"Can you forgive me, mademoiselle?" he asked, anxiously. "It was my fault, but I never meant to do it." The sadness in his voice went to Cecil's heart.

"God helping me, Bey, I do forgive you," she answered with quivering lips; "but please don't speak about it any more."

The boy kissed her hand again in silence, and the compact was sealed, but the subject which neither of them mentioned was continually in both their minds. They went to lessons as usual, and Cecil tried honestly to behave to her pupil just as she had always done; but once or twice the thought of that scene in the Kurdish stronghold returned upon her so powerfully that she turned from him with an irrepressible shudder. She could see it all—the group of fanatical mountaineers on the brow of the precipice surrounding the solitary figure with bound hands and ragged Armenian dress.

She could hear the rapid questions and answers passing between the Kurds and their prisoner, and the fierce taunts and shout of derision that succeeded them. And then—then—she saw the headlong plunge outwards into space, the piteous crash, the mangled form that lay motionless at the foot of the steep, a blood-stained heap of rags, as it had appeared to the trembling Hanna, forced to his knees by the murderers on the cliff above that he might behold their work.

"Oh, Charlie, Charlie, if I could have died instead!" she cried, wildly, dropping her book and beginning to pace up and down the *lewan*, every nerve throbbing with the bitter consciousness of her own powerlessness at the time of Charlie's greatest need. And she had known nothing of it at the time! How was it that no sense of his danger had penetrated to her mind—that she had not known intuitively that he was tasting the bitterness of death while she was occupied in trying to still the petty squabbles between her servants and those of Jamileh Khanum? Surely there must be something wanting in her, that such a crisis could arrive in the life of the man to whom her whole heart was given, and she know nothing of it? True, she could not have helped him, but she could have prayed with him and for him, and perhaps some hint of her distant sympathy might have reached him even at that terrible moment.

"Mademoiselle!" said Azim Bey, timidly, and Cecil pressed her hands to her head and sat down again, trying hard to conquer the feeling of repulsion which the boy's mere presence gave her. The natural fairness of her mind would not allow her to hold him responsible for the extreme consequences of his childish jealousy, but she dared not trust herself to dwell upon the thought that but for his interference Charlie might be

live and well now. The memory which she thus thrust from her had come unbidden to the mind of Azim Bey, and for once his remorse was deep and lasting. Cecil's white face and heavy eyes were a constant reproach to him, and he did his utmost to testify his sorrow for what he had done. Any wish that she expressed was to be gratified immediately, and he watched over her and waited upon her with a faithfulness which touched her extremely. The women and Mas'ud followed his example, and vied with each other in doing her all the kindnesses in their power; but as the weeks passed on, it became evident that other people were not so forbearing. Latifeh Kalfa was a frequent visitor to the courtyard at this time, and took to gossiping with the nannies when she found herself shunned by the white women as a bringer of evil tidings; and what happened immediately afterwards left little doubt that she had been commissioned to report on what she saw and heard. Jamileh Khanum sent for Azim Bey and questioned him closely as to the cause of the change which had come over his governess. He returned from his interview with her grave and unhappy, but said nothing before the servants.

"Mademoiselle," he said to Cecil, as they sat beside the brazier after supper, "there is something I must say to you. You have enemies in the harem, and they make up lying reports about you to tell my father when he returns. The little lady mother said to Mdlle. Katrina when I was there that you were going mad, and that you had taken a dislike to me and would murder me. They know what happened to—him, and they think you will try to avenge his death on me."

"And you are not afraid, Bey?" asked Cecil, with a sad smile.

"I? oh no, mademoiselle. I know that you are good, and that you love me, since you have even forgiven me. I don't want them to send you away from me, but that is what they wish to do, and they will do it if they can persuade the Pasha. They are going to send the *hakim bashi* to see you, and they will talk to him beforehand, so that he will do what they tell him. Could you not look a little more cheerful, dear mademoiselle, just when he comes?"

"I will try," said Cecil, but when she looked at herself in the glass it struck her that the attempt would be of little use. Could that pale, sad face, from which mournful eyes looked out at her, be her own? If so, it was no wonder that Jamileh Khanum was startled by the change, since even Cecil herself found it surprising. The strain of keeping up her spirits in Azim Bey's presence was tremendous, and day after day the difficulty of going through the routine of work and recreation became greater. But for his sake she would try to impress the physician favourably, impossible though it seemed even to affect cheerfulness.

The *hakim bashi* arrived, and she did her best, receiving him with what composure she could muster, and forcing herself to an unexpected burst of high spirits, which only confirmed the physician in the belief which his patroness and her attendant had diligently instilled into his mind, that Mdle. Antaza's brain was affected. In this opinion he was strengthened when, on coming back hastily to fetch something he had left, he surprised Cecil in a fit of deep depression, into which she had sunk on the withdrawal of the momentary excitement. For a time, however, nothing came of his visit, and Azim Bey's household began to hope that the alarm had been a false one, designed by Jamileh Khanum for the pur-

of frightening them, when an order came from the aga that everything was to be packed up, and every one ready to start at a moment's notice. Flushed with victory, Ahmed Khémi was returning to Baghdad by a slightly different route from that which he had taken in 1891, and his household, with the military escort, was met him at a spot situated a good deal lower down the mountain than was Sardiyeh.

Two or three days after the order had been given, the aga and her pupil were disturbed at breakfast by a sudden invasion of their courtyard. Two of the harem women swaggered in, and with more than their usual confidence announced that they brought the Khanum's orders. Azim Bey and his attendants were to start that morning with the harem procession, which was almost ready for the journey, but Mdlla. Antaza and her nurse were to remain where they were for the present. Cecil's anger rose at this cool command. "The Khanum Effendi has no right to detain me," she said, quickly.

"Obedience to the aga's order," was the sole reply, and the chief aga produced a document which on examination proved to be a permission from his Excellency for Mdlla. Antaza to remain behind in the mountains for rest, according to the *hakim bashi's* recommendation, until her health should be completely restored. Sardiyeh was to continue to be her residence until further orders should be received. Cecil read the paper through and handed it calmly to the man. Nothing had power to astonish him now. If the order had been for her instant execution she would scarcely have felt surprise. But to the other women the blow came unexpectedly, and they rushed forward with loud weeping to kiss her hands and the hem of her dress. That they feared some-

thing much worse than the letter implied was evident, and they heaped blessings and expressions of pity upon her alternately, while Um Yusuf stood by and abused the agas roundly, in especial threatening them in such moving terms with the wrath of the Balio Bey that they glanced round apprehensively, as though expecting to see Sir Dugald appear miraculously in all his might as the champion of injured virtue. Speedily recovering themselves, however, they drove off the women, wailing and beating their breasts and calling down maledictions upon the agas' respective ancestors, while Azim Bey, who had been standing at Cecil's side, was also ordered to accompany them. The boy's very lips were white as he kissed his governess's hand.

"Don't lose heart, mademoiselle," he whispered. "I know they intend evil against you, but my father shall know everything, and if he will not help I will speak to the Balio Bey."

"Are we to be left here alone?" asked Cecil of the agas.

"My lady's servants are charged by the Khanum Effendi to wait upon and watch over her and her nurse," said the chief, gruffly.

"We are to be prisoners, then?" said Cecil, as Azim Bey shuddered and gripped her hand more tightly.

"That is as my lady pleases," returned the man. "Within these walls she may do what she likes, but outside there are the Kurds and the worshippers of Shaitan, and the Mutesalim will be returning, who has no fear of the Balio Bey, and therefore the Khanum Effendi, in her care for my lady, considers that it will be well for her not to leave the house."

"Listen to me, O Aga Mansur," cried Azim Bey, "and upon thy head be it if thou fail in what I

command thee. I leave mademoiselle in thy charge, and if she suffers any hurt, I swear by my father's beard that thou shalt pay for it."

"Upon my head be it, O my lord," was the ceremonious answer. "Will it please my lord now to depart?"

Azim Bey went out with all the dignity he could muster, though the tears were very near his eyes, while the two strange agas took Masûd's place at the gate and proceeded to arrange their belongings in his room. The door was now shut, and the two captives returned to the *lewan* to consider the situation.

"The Khanum Effendi want kill us," said Um Yusuf, angry and alarmed. "You got pistol, mademoiselle? knife? dagger?"

"Only a penknife," said Cecil, wearily. "What does it signify, Um Yusuf? I don't believe they mean to kill us, and if they did, a penknife wouldn't prevent them."

But Um Yusuf was not to be silenced. She instituted a methodical search for arms, and was successful in discovering two table-knives which had been brought from Baghdad for Cecil's use. The shape and size of these made them difficult to carry about the person, but she concealed them with great care among the cushions of the divan, and felt happier. At night her fears revived, and she dragged her bed into her mistress's room, and insisted on closing the window and barricading the door with every movable thing she could find, and this state of siege she maintained with unflagging perseverance. The two agas took no notice, and seemed to feel little interest in anything their prisoners did. If their intentions were evil, they feared Um Yusuf's precautions too much to

put them into execution, and thus days and weeks slipped by without alarm.

To Cecil the time was one of rest, so much needed as to be almost welcome. She made little or no attempt to occupy herself with books or work, but sat on the house-top gazing at the mountains and the sky, and seldom speaking. Um Yusuf became very uneasy about her, fearing this quiet acquiescence in her grief almost more than the feverish excitement of the days before the departure of Azim Bey and the rest. It seemed to her that her mistress needed rousing and taking out of herself, and she honestly did her best to effect this, according to her lights. She encouraged her to sketch, tried in vain to induce her to study, and even gave herself the trouble of fashioning a draught-board and set of men, with the aid of one of the precious table-knives, so that she might invite her to play.

"Why you not write your memoirs, mademoiselle?" she said more than once. "The Khanum Effendi's governess, in Tahir Pasha's house, she always write when she was alone, say she get great deal of money some day. She put in all that everybody say, and all the things she not like."

"My experiences are not interesting enough," Cecil would say, patiently, for she knew that Um Yusuf teased her from the best possible motives. "I couldn't write about the things I have really felt, and who cares nowadays for descriptions of ruins and deserts? When I am dead, Fitz and Eily and the rest can publish my letters for their grandchildren's benefit, if they like, but I won't do it."

Um Yusuf would yield for the moment with a sigh, and proceed to relate stories from her family history, with the view of diverting Cecil's mind from her own

sorrows, and showing her that there were people worse off than herself. The stories were all about massacres, and fearful torments endured at the hands of Moslems and Druses, of a character to make the listener's hair stand on end with horror on ordinary occasions, but Cecil could not be roused into taking more than a languid interest in the events described. Sometimes she did not even hear them. It never struck Um Yusuf that this season of absolute rest was exactly what her mistress needed, coming, as it did, when body and mind, stunned by a fearful shock, were almost failing under the effort to carry on the everyday routine of work. There was an atmosphere of calm which almost amounted to happiness spread over these days, and Cecil lived through them idly, her mind dwelling in the past, with no thought of the future. The sense of abiding loss was always with her, but she lived over again the five years during which she had known Charlie, and felt almost as though his presence were near her still. No thought of picturing the infinite sadness of a return to daily life without him had yet presented itself to trouble her, just as she had not energy enough to speculate on the duration of her imprisonment, nor to form any plans as to her future. It was a time merely of waiting, uncoloured either by hope or despair.

CHAPTER XXV.

"THE VOICE OF ENGLAND IN THE EAST."

LEAVING Cecil and Um Yusuf in their captivity at Sardiyeh, the harem procession made its way down the winding mountain-paths, a curious assemblage of closely swathed white figures mounted on mules and donkeys, and headed by the waving curtains of Jamileh Khanum's litter. On either side rode the black agas, armed with whips with which to drive off any inquisitive wayfarer; and before and behind came the guard of soldiers whom the Pasha had left under the charge of his master of the horse for the purpose of protecting his wife. At the end of the train of women and agas rode Azim Bey and his attendants, obliged to follow even the negresses who acted as cooks and scullerymaids, a humiliation which sorely tasked the boy's proud spirit. But this was not the worst. He felt convinced, from the meaning looks and whispered words which passed among the women, that the Khanum Effendi was considered to have gained not only a moral but a material victory in that she had succeeded in getting rid of Cecil. That some evil was intended against him, to which his governess's presence was considered a bar, he was sure, and he felt more

lonely and helpless than he had ever done in his life. And indeed Jamileh Khanum was jubilant as she reclined on her gold-embroidered cushions. She had accomplished the task in which she had so often failed, and separated Cecil from her pupil with comparatively little difficulty.

"You must get rid of Mdlle. Antaza if you wish to reach Azim Bey," had been one of M. Karalampi's messages to her through Mdlle. Katrina. "Separately we can deal with them easily, but together they are too strong for us."

This had been the secret of the attempts made to sap the loyalty of the servants, and induce them to bring a false accusation against Cecil—this also of the hints and threatenings of murder which had alarmed Um Yusuf; but it was M. Karalampi, assisted unintentionally by Azim Bey himself, who had devised the plan by which the news of Charlie's murder had after all produced the desired effect. So far everything had gone smoothly. Immediately after telling his story to Cecil, Hanna had been seized and conveyed to a distance, and was now in safe custody, for it was no part of the scheme that he should be allowed to reach Baghdad and acquaint the Balio Bey with what had happened. And now, as she counted the hours until the place named by the Pasha as the rendezvous should be reached, Jamileh Khanum felt calm and triumphant. Her part in the conspiracy had been faithfully performed; it only rested with M. Karalampi to do his share. Everything was ready; Mdlle. Katrina had only to see her nephew and give him the message that Azim Bey was now unprotected by the presence of his governess, and might safely be attacked. All details were left to him; the only thing that Jamileh

Khanum cared for was to get her stepson out of the way.

But at the rendezvous disappointment was awaiting her. Neither M. Karalampi nor his ill-conditioned servant was to be seen, and it was some time before Mdlla. Katrina succeeded in discovering that they were not with the Pasha at all. Instead of being in attendance on his Excellency, M. Karalampi had been left behind in the disturbed district, nominally as secretary to the Mutesalim, who had been wounded during the Pasha's military operations, but in reality as a spy upon him, to the great disgust of both. The Mutesalim naturally resented the indignity of being saddled with a guardian who must be "squared" by receiving a considerable share of every piece of plunder unless his charge's doings were to be reported to the Pasha, and a good deal blackened in the process, but his emotions were mild compared with those of M. Karalampi. His anger arose from the fact that by this action the Pasha had unconsciously neutralised all his plans. Of what use was it to have devised these complicated manœuvres for getting Cecil out of the way, if he could not proceed with the designs he had formed against her pupil? Worse than this, he felt a presentiment that in her wrath and disappointment Jamileh Khanum would try to do the work herself, in some clumsy inartistic way that would lead to the ruin of the whole scheme, and he was right.

Now that the harem procession had rejoined that of his Excellency, no further stay was made in the mountains, and the whole cavalcade proceeded on its way towards Baghdad. At one of the towns through which it passed a fair was being held, and the Pasha consented that half a day should be spent in this place,

at the earnest request of the master of the horse, who saw a chance of replenishing the Palace stables at moderate cost. The decision was not quite so satisfactory to the merchants and country-people who had brought horses to sell at the fair, for they foresaw an unequal contest, in which their wares would be taken from them at such prices as seemed good to the master of the horse, with all the power of the Pasha behind him. With many laments, therefore, they settled in their own minds the bribe which must be offered to the official in order to secure his meeting their views in each case, and bemoaned their hard lot in coming to the fair just as his Excellency was passing through the town. But to Jamileh Khanum the fair presented itself as offering a providential solution of a difficulty. Taking counsel with no one, she intrusted her chief aga with a confidential commission to buy for her the handsomest and wickedest Kurdish pony he could find, and to have it fitted with saddle and bridle of the finest materials and workmanship regardless of expense. Her order was carried out to the letter. The aga secured a pony which bore the worst of reputations from all its owners, for it had already changed hands repeatedly, and would have been got rid of as useless had it not been for its beauty. Its chief merit with reference to the particular end in view was the general testimony that these peculiarities of character did not become evident until the intending rider was in the saddle, and the chief aga rubbed his hands with delight as he superintended the decking of the animal with the most gorgeous trappings he could procure.

"The Khanum Effendi will be well pleased," he muttered to himself, feeling already in his hand the bakhshish which his mistress placed there a short time

afterwards, when she had inspected the pony and heard its record. The next step was to send it round to Azim Bey's quarters as a present from his stepmother, and had he been in reality the guileless child that Jamileh Khanum trusted he might show himself, his career would probably have ended as abruptly as she wished. But he was to the full as wily and as suspicious as herself, and the mere circumstance of her sending him a present was sufficient to put him on his guard. He sent his thanks to the donor in the most orthodox way, walked round the pony in delight, examining its beauties, and called little Ishak, the slipper-bearer.

"Mount the pony for me, O Ishak," he said, "and ride him round the courtyard, that I may see his paces."

"Upon my head be it, O my lord," responded Ishak, and did his best to obey. But no sooner was he mounted than the animal gave a complicated bound, something between a standing leap, a wriggle, and a buck-jump, and Ishak came to the ground with a crash.

"God is great!" burst from Masûd. "What wisdom is this of my lord's?"

"Take him up, and send for the *hakim bashi*," said Azim Bey, "and take care that the pony is kept for the Pasha to see."

Severe concussion of the brain was the result of the experiment on poor little Ishak's part, but the *hakim bashi* pointed out that to any one but a negro the blow would have meant almost certain death, a fact which spoke volumes to the Pasha. His Excellency accepted the warning thus conveyed, for he had felt anxious about his son's safety ever since he had heard of

Cecil's illness. Had the report of the case reached him on the authority of Jamileh Khanum alone, he would not have believed it; but when, at her earnest request, he had sent his own physician to see Mdle. Antaza, and he confirmed her account, he could not well refuse the governess a few weeks of rest, even at the cost of danger to Azim Bey. Now he resolved to keep the boy with him constantly until Cecil's return, and never to allow him out of his sight.

Under these circumstances Azim Bey made sure that he should be able to secure Cecil's recall at once; but in this he was reckoning without his host, as he found when he tried to approach the subject with his father. He supposed that he had only to tell the Pasha that the Khanum Effendi was keeping made-moiselle a prisoner at Sardiyeh for her to be released immediately; but to his amazement and mortification he was merely told that it was not so at all—that made-moiselle was taking a little rest by the doctor's orders, and could not return to Baghdad for the present. To be treated like a child in this way was sufficiently annoying, but it was worse to feel conscious the whole time that if he only dared to say what he knew, matters would be set right. But this was impossible. He was afraid to tell his father of Charlie's return and death, lest he should get into trouble for his share in the latter; and he had also a very real fear that M. Karalampi might revenge himself upon him afterwards, now that he was so completely in his power. His entreaties that Cecil might be allowed to rejoin him were thus made in vain, for the Pasha, ignorant of any reason for her prostrate state, could only attribute it, as the *hakim bashi* had done, to an overworked brain and incipient madness. Complete rest for a

short time was the only thing that could be tried ; and the Pasha intended, though he did not tell his son this, to send the physician again to Sardiyeh in the course of a few weeks, that he might examine the patient anew, and judge if there were any hope of her recovery. This being the case, the boy's constant references to his governess became rather wearisome to the Pasha, and after several valiant attempts to press the subject on his father's attention, Azim Bey found himself peremptorily silenced, and forbidden to allude to it again. When they reached Baghdad he was watched over much too closely to allow of his speaking either to Sir Dugald or Lady Haigh, and thus his second avenue of escape was closed. The *hakim bashi* was sent to the Residency to tell the Balio Bey that Mdlla. Antaza had been ill, and was spending some time longer in the mountains for rest and change, and it did not occur to any one that there was anything strange underlying this apparently straightforward message.

Any anxiety which was felt at the Residency at this time was entirely on Charlie's account. Lady Haigh had not heard from him for months, and no letters from him to Cecil had passed through Sir Dugald's hands. It was supposed, however, that she had written to tell him of the plan of spending the summer in the hills, and that he had found some new channel of communication with her by way of Mosul or Erzeroum, while he was probably so busy at home in having his house done up that he had no time to write to other people. In this happy confidence Lady Haigh remained until she received a letter from Mrs Howard White, who with her husband had spent a few days at the Residency on her homeward journey from

Hillah, and was now in England. Lady Haigh took up the letter and opened it with somewhat languid interest, anticipating nothing more than a graceful acknowledgment of her kind hospitality, and some information as to the light in which Professor Howard White's discoveries were regarded by the learned world. But after a very brief message of thanks, the writer dashed at once into another subject.

" . . . I feel that I must write to you," she said, "and only hope that my warning may prove to be unnecessary. It will be news to you to hear that your cousin, Dr Egerton, was in Hillah just before we left it, disguised as an Armenian trader. At his earnest request I arranged a meeting between him and Miss Anstruther in my house, but they had no private conversation, owing to the presence of Miss Anstruther's pupil. It is my impression that the secret remained undiscovered by Azim Bey, but I cannot be sure of this. Dr Egerton avowed to me the next day his intention of following, unknown to her, the Pasha's caravan, in which Miss Anstruther was travelling, and I was unable to dissuade him from it. I promised to keep his secret, lest Sir Dugald should interfere with the scheme, but now that so long a time has elapsed without any news of him, I feel it only right to tell you all I know in order that inquiries may be made. I understand that Dr Egerton has not returned home, and that neither his aunt nor Miss Anstruther's family know anything of his movements. . . ."

Lady Haigh read the letter through with a face of horror, and rushed with it to Sir Dugald's office.

"Read that, Dugald!" she cried, flinging it down before him, "and then leave those papers and go and see the Pasha at once. You must do it."

"H'm," said Sir Dugald, lifting his eyebrows as he took up the letter; "the doctor in trouble again, I suppose? Ah!" as he read it, "this is what Miss Anstruther was afraid of, is it? Poor girl! It might be the best thing for her that he should disappear;" but he rose, nevertheless, and began to put away his papers.

"What a mercy that Cecil is not here!" burst from Lady Haigh. "The anxiety would kill her. I only hope that she will stay quietly in the mountains until we hear something certain. Do go, Dugald."

Sir Dugald was already starting, and reached the Palace unheralded, regardless of the etiquette for which he was generally so rigorous a stickler. The Pasha received him with some trepidation. As soon as his Excellency was told that the Balio Bey wished to see him, an uneasy conscience led him to recall uncomfortably a few of his recent acts of government, and in particular to wonder whether the length of Jamileh Khanum's latest dressmaker's bill, and the means adopted to satisfy the Parisian firm interested, had become public. He was proportionately relieved on finding that Sir Dugald's visit had nothing to do with any of his own peccadilloes, but concerned only the English doctor, whose existence, as well as his sudden departure from Baghdad, the Pasha had forgotten long ago. Little time was needed to show that his Excellency knew nothing of Dr Egerton's proceedings or of his fate.

"I must ask your Excellency to let Azim Bey be summoned," said Sir Dugald, when he had satisfied himself of the Pasha's innocence. "No stone must be left unturned to solve this mystery."

Azim Bey was sent for, and presently appeared, attended by Mas'ûd. Glancing from one to the other of

the occupants of the room, and noticing that his father looked perturbed and the Balio Bey stern, he felt a sudden conviction that the reward of his youthful misdeeds was at hand.

"Question my son yourself, my dear Balio," said the Pasha, in his most urbane manner; and the culprit, shaking with misgiving, found himself set down opposite the terrible Balio Bey, who looked at him fixedly for a moment.

"Bey," he said at last, "where is Dr Egerton?"

Azim Bey's courage was rapidly oozing away, but he made a brave attempt to turn the question aside in a sportive and natural manner.

"How, then?" he asked. "Do you ask me about Dr Egerton, M. le Balio? Surely it is said that no Englishman can enter the pashalik without your knowing all about him at once?"

"In this case it is more to the point that you knew him to be in the pashalik," replied Sir Dugald; and Azim Bey, seeing that he had betrayed himself, looked blank. "I know very well," continued the Balio, taking a bold step in his turn, and fixing his eyes on the boy's face, "that you saw him in disguise at Hillah and recognised him, and that you then gave instructions respecting him to some of his Excellency's dependents. What were those orders, and where is Dr Egerton now?"

Quick as lightning the thought darted into Azim Bey's head that he had been betrayed. Not perceiving that what had been said was the result of a shrewd guess on Sir Dugald's part, he leaped to the conclusion that Ishak had been questioned and had implicated him in his answers, and it seemed to him immediately that the whole plot must be known.

"He is dead," he murmured, with hanging head. The

effect upon his auditor made Azim Bey perceive too late that he had again incriminated himself unnecessarily.

"Dead!" cried Sir Dugald, in a voice that made the Pasha jump.

"Yes—Oh, M. le Balio, that was not my fault. I hated him, and I wanted the Kurds to take him prisoner, and they murdered him. I did not want him to die—indeed I did not—I did not mean to have him killed."

"But this is impossible!" cried the Pasha. "What could make you hate this English gentleman, my son?"

"I hated him because mademoiselle was in love with him," returned the boy without hesitation. His father looked scandalised, and Sir Dugald frowned heavily.

"There is no need whatever to bring Miss Anstruther's name into the conversation," he said, adding, as he turned to the Pasha, "I cannot conceive that these are the real facts of the case, your Excellency. It seems to me that Azim Bey must have been used as a tool by some enemy of Dr Egerton's."

"But indeed it is not so, M. le Balio," Azim Bey protested eagerly. "It was I who hated him, and when mad—I mean when *she* was angry with me about him, I spoke to M. Karalampi, and he made the people of the city hate him, so that he had to leave Baghdad."

"Ah!" broke from Sir Dugald, while the Pasha was silent through sheer astonishment, the minds of both going back to the mysterious events which had preceded Charlie Egerton's departure. Sir Dugald recovered himself first.

"And Karalampi has been your agent in these last negotiations also, Bey? I thought so. Your Excellency," he said to the Pasha, "I must ask you to have M. Karalampi arrested and brought here at once."

"The order shall be sent immediately," said the Pasha, and he called Ovannes Effendi from the ante-room. While the necessary directions were being given, Azim Bey crept close to Sir Dugald.

"M. le Balio, you will ask my father to let mademoiselle come back from Sardiyeh now?" he asked, anxiously.

"Certainly not," replied Sir Dugald, emphatically. "I am most thankful to think that Miss Anstruther is out of the way for the present. I shall not advise her to return until this matter has been inquired into."

"Oh, monsieur, but——" began Azim Bey; but Sir Dugald cut him short, and took his leave of the Pasha, requesting to be summoned as soon as M. Karalampi arrived. To Lady Haigh he made as light of the matter as he could, protesting that in Azim Bey's case he believed that the wish for Charlie's death was father to the thought, but in his own mind he had very little doubt that the news was true. The mutual dislike of M. Karalampi and Charlie had not escaped his notice, and he felt that it was extremely probable that the Greek had taken the opportunity of carrying out his compact with Azim Bey a little too well. While waiting for him to be arrested and brought down to Baghdad, Sir Dugald collected a good deal of information which corroborated the boy's account of the intrigue by which Charlie had been driven from his post, and he awaited the arrival of the prisoner with the comfortable conviction that there was very nearly evidence enough to hang him already. But the expected summons to the Palace to confront the accused did not come, and Sir Dugald grew impatient. At last he went himself to speak to the

Pasha on the subject, but in the anteroom he was seized upon by Azim Bey.

"Oh, M. le Balio, you would not come, and I could not go to see you. He has been here, and my father has let him go again."

"Who? Karalampi?" cried Sir Dugald. "Tell me what you mean."

They sat down on the divan, and Azim Bey poured his tale into the Balio's ear. How M. Karalampi had arrived, all unconscious of the reason for the summons, from his post in the mountains, and had found himself accused of plotting Dr Egerton's murder. How he had protested his innocence, and had promised to bring proofs of it, if he were allowed to go back to the mountains with an escort and penetrate into the Kurdish fastnesses. How the Pasha had demurred to this, but had yielded on M. Karalampi's declaring that otherwise he would make a clean breast of everything to the Balio Bey, and involve Jamileh Khanum in his disclosures. This was the only card he had to play, but, thanks to the Pasha's agonised desire to prevent scandal, it was successful, and he was allowed to depart, under strict supervision. Sir Dugald listened with lowering brow, and when the recital was ended he rose from his seat with a fixed resolve to see the Pasha and thresh the matter out with him, but Azim Bey was still clinging to his arm.

"Oh, M. le Balio, bring mademoiselle back. They are keeping her in prison there at Sardiyeh, and it is only this—the death of Dr Egerton—that has made her ill."

"What? she knows already? and the poor girl is all alone up there!" cried Sir Dugald, and he strode into the Pasha's presence with a frown which made his Excellency tremble. His demand that Cecil should

be sent for was at once granted, and an escort despatched to bring her from Sardiyeh to Baghdad. But Sir Dugald had been forestalled. The news of what had been happening had reached the harem, and had caused a vast amount of commotion there, together with much coming and going of Mdlla. Katrina, imperfectly disguised in a voluminous sheet, between her mistress and M. Karalampi, during the short time that he spent in the city. The result was that an order had been sent to Sardiyeh, which reached it two days before the Pasha's.

CHAPTER XXVI

A DREAD TRIBUNAL

WHEN Jamileh Khanum's message reached Sardiyeh, it put an end at once to the tranquil and monotonous life which the two captives had been leading. They were informed late in the evening, immediately after the arrival of the courier, that they must prepare to start on a journey early the next morning, but they sought in vain from their gaolers for particulars of their destination, and for the reason of the sudden move. At first they consoled themselves under this taciturnity by mutual assurances that when they had once started they would certainly be able to discover at least the general direction of their march from the features of the country and the course of the sun; but when the time for the journey came, they found that this solace was to be denied them. A mule-litter was brought into the courtyard—not a gorgeous *takhtrevan* like that in which Jamileh Khanum queened it at the head of the harem procession, but a far humbler contrivance—and they were assisted to mount into it. It consisted simply of two large panniers, or *kajavaahs*, suspended one on either side of a tall and sturdy mule, and surmounted by a high framework of cane, covered

in and curtained all round with thick haircloth, so that the occupants found themselves in a kind of small dark tent, with the mule's back between them as a table. The position in which they were obliged to remain was an exceedingly cramped and uncomfortable one, more especially to Cecil, since her pannier had to be weighted with several large stones in order to balance Um Yusuf's, the good woman being much heavier than her mistress. The rough curtains promised certainly to be useful in keeping out the cold mountain winds, for it was now winter, and in this highland district the snow was on the ground, but they would also prevent entirely any sight of the scenery passed on the road. For the moment, however, they were left undrawn, while the agas were busy seeing to the loading of the baggage-mules, and Cecil took a last look through the open doorway of the court at the white houses of the little town, and at the frowning mountains beyond, in some cleft of which was Charlie's nameless grave.

"It is like leaving home again, Um Yusuf," she said, with tears in her eyes. "I should like to stay here always."

Perhaps Um Yusuf, like Lady Haigh, detested sentiment. At any rate, she disliked the mountains very heartily, and she answered rather snappishly—

"You do no good here, mademoiselle. Once we leave this horrid place, you get plenty work to do, feel better."

Here the agas came and drew close the black curtains, and the mule started off, led by a stalwart villager, who had been impressed into the Pasha's service, and whose guttural remarks to the animal were the chief sounds that reached the ears of the two

captives during the next fortnight, after which he was allowed to return to his home as best he might. The journey, which was carried on under such uncomfortable conditions for Cecil and Um Yusuf, lasted in all sixteen days, during which time they never obtained an inkling of their destination, knowing only that their caravan was kept persistently on the march during the hours of daylight. At night a tent was pitched for them, in which they found their own mattresses and other baggage; and with respect to food, they fared as well as did their guards, who exacted from the peasantry in the Pasha's name whatever they desired. They never halted at night until after the sun was set; and whenever in the early morning they succeeded, as they passed from the tent to the litter, in obtaining a glimpse of the surrounding scenery, it was always unfamiliar to both of them. When on the march, it was possible for them to tell whether the mule was going up or down hill, and also whether the road traversed was smooth or rough or slippery, but these changes were far too frequent and bewildering to be any guide as to the locality.

When they had journeyed on for about ten days, the prisoners noticed a great change in their surroundings, much more bustle and conversation being perceptible about them than before. After much careful listening, they became aware that their caravan had joined another and a much larger one, in which women's voices, all speaking Kurdish, were distinctly audible. That night they rested at a wayside khan, instead of in tents; and although a compartment of the building, called by courtesy a room, was specially reserved for Cecil and her maid, it was invaded, in the temporary absence of the agas, by several of the Kurdish ladies,

who came to stare at their fellow-travellers. They seemed to wish to be friendly, but as neither party knew anything of the other's language, the only possible approach to communication was to smile affably at one another and exchange gestures of mutual goodwill. One of the visitors brought with her her baby, which was suffering from ophthalmia; and when they were gone, Cecil bethought her of a little bottle of eye-water among her possessions, and despatched Um Yusuf after them to offer it to the mother. The attention seemed to be appreciated, for the chief of the Kurdish ladies sent them presently, through one of the agas, a dish from her own supper, and Cecil overlooked the extremely doubtful and untempting nature of the gift in view of the kindness intended. While she nibbled daintily at one or two fragments chosen from the mass, and Um Yusuf ate her way steadily through it, it struck Cecil to ask whether her maid had found any one among the strangers' slaves able to speak Arabic or Turkish. Um Yusuf shook her head but Cecil, knowing the marvellous freemasonry of signs by which the servants of different nationalities were able to carry on whole conversations without uttering a word, asked whether she had discovered anything about the Kurdish ladies.

"They prisoners, like us," said Um Yusuf, withdrawing her attention for a moment from the tray of food. "They come from the mountains, but not know where they go. Chief lady's husband very great man, but I think he killed or in prison. Ladies all hate Pasha very much."

This was all that the two captives could learn from their companions in misfortune, but both parties felt some consolation in each other's presence. The agas appeared

to have no objection to their charges mingling with the Kurdish ladies, probably considering that little mischief could be done without the aid of the tongue, and Cecil found herself installed as consulting physician to her new friends, thanks to her eye-water, which showed signs of effecting a cure. With other ailments she was not so successful, owing to the difficulty of discovering symptoms by the aid of signs alone; but the mountain ladies held her in prodigious respect, and acquiesced cheerfully in the keeping for her of the best room every night at the khan, even going out of their way to do her little kindnesses. Thus the days went on until one afternoon when Um Yusuf and her mistress, jogging along in their respective *kajavahs*, heard one of the agas say to the other—

“Go to the leader of the caravan, O Mansûr, and urge him to push on, that we may reach the city by sunset, for there is a storm coming up.”

Cecil and Um Yusuf looked across at one another in the twilight of their moving tent with a sudden tightening of the breath, and their hands met mechanically in a convulsive clasp. They were nearing a city, and therefore some change, possibly some crisis, was at hand. It was with the most strained interest that they observed the mule's stately pace quicken gradually, and heard the shouts and blows of the camel-drivers around them, as they urged on their animals. After a time there came a pause, in which the shouting and quarrelling that generally marked the progress of the caravan seemed to grow louder.

“A block at the gate,” said Cecil in a voice of subdued eagerness, and presently the caravan moved on again, and the travellers became conscious of the hum of a great city all around them. But there was nothing to

tell them where they were. The babel of many tongues which met their ears might belong to almost any city in the East; and the call of a muezzin, which forced itself upon their hearing from the minaret of a mosque as they passed along, was as little distinctive. Immediately afterwards they turned into a stone-paved court, passed through various doorways and passages, and finally stopped in another courtyard. One of the agas drew back the curtains, and Cecil, with beating heart, allowed herself to be helped down, and looked round in a tumult of anticipation. What she expected to see she could not have told, but the reality which met her eyes was disappointing. It was neither familiar nor out of the way, merely the inner court of an ordinary whitewashed house, which, for all its distinctive peculiarities, might have been found in any city of South-Western Asia or Northern Africa. Above was a stormy sky, in which black rolling clouds were fast obscuring the rays of the setting sun. Standing beside the mule were the two agas, engaged in giving confidential directions to a middle-aged negress of a peculiarly stolid and sturdy type, while Um Yusuf, just helped down from her perch, was sitting on the ground and groaning out that she had the cramp all over her limbs. There was no sign of the friendly Kurdish ladies, no trace of any inhabitants other than their own party in the house. As Cecil realised this, the agas, having finished their colloquy, led the mule out of the yard, and the prisoners found themselves left alone with the negress, who motioned to them silently to follow her. They obeyed disconsolately enough, and she led them through several passages to a tiny room with one window high up in the wall. Here she left them, returning presently to bring in coffee and a dish of

food, uncertain in its nature and by no means captivating in its appearance, and then departing again. Um Yusuf slipped out immediately, and Cecil divined that she was going to try her powers of fascination on their guide. But she returned discouraged.

"She not tell anything," she observed, morosely. "Worse than the Kurds; they not able to talk. There! you hear, mademoiselle? She lock us in."

The grating of the ponderous key in its complicated lock was distinctly audible, and Cecil resigned herself with a sigh to the hard fact that it was absolutely impossible to obtain any clue to their whereabouts that night. When they had partaken of their untempting repast, Um Yusuf unrolled and spread out the bedding, but the storm had begun, and the gusts of wind which shook the house were so violent that neither she nor her mistress felt inclined to sleep.

"Where are we, Um Yusuf?" asked Cecil. Um Yusuf cast up her eyes and lifted her empty hands to indicate absolute ignorance.

"Do you think they can have taken us across the mountains to Sulaminyeh?" pursued Cecil, putting into words a fear which had begun to haunt her.

"Yes, mademoiselle, that what I think," returned Um Yusuf.

Cecil was silent, listening to the patter and swish of the storm, and the fall of the plaster from the ceiling. The wind moaned and howled, and seemed to be almost strong enough to tear the house from its foundations, while over all there came a loud rushing sound, now close at hand, now farther off, like that of water lashed into fury by a tempest. She did not recognise it at first, but it occurred to her suddenly what it was.

"Listen!" she said to Um Yusuf, glad of any pretext

for doubting the dreadful suggestion which she had herself made. "I am sure I hear the sound of waves washing up against the walls. The house must be on the river somewhere. Can we be at Mohammerah?"

"No, mademoiselle; we not passed the marshes, and journey not long enough. I think this Sulaminyeh. Why not river there?"

Cecil shuddered. To be imprisoned in the heart of Kurdistan, many long miles away from any English or even European official, with no one to whom to appeal for protection or justice, was not a comfortable prospect. She said no more to Um Yusuf, and at last, as they sat side by side upon their mattresses, she dropped asleep, lulled by the howling of the wind. After what seemed only a few minutes, though she knew later that it must have been some hours, she awoke with a start, to find that it was broad daylight, and that Um Yusuf was standing beside her with an excited face.

"Mademoiselle, we in the plains again, not at Sulaminyeh. That storm not rain at all, dust-storm. I think this place Mosul. When dust fall about in the night, I think it only stuff off walls, but now I look, see it all thick on everything. You see this?"

Cecil sat up, and gazed in bewilderment at the handful of dust and sand which Um Yusuf had gathered up as a precious treasure. Then she recognised the maid's allusion to the dust-storms peculiar to the Euphrates Valley, and conceived for the handful of dust an affection akin to that which Noah must have felt for the olive-leaf brought him by the dove. The fact that everything in the room was covered with gritty sand, and that it had made its way into her hair and clothes, was not worthy of notice in view of this discovery, and she and Um Yusuf made a rather difficult toilet with

thankful hearts. They breakfasted on the remains of their last night's supper, which had fortunately been covered up and had thus escaped the dust, and immediately afterwards the unattractive negress who had been their guide the night before unlocked the door and came in with a great bundle in her arms.

"It is commanded thee to put on these clothes, O my mistress," she said in Arabic, dumping down the bundle before Cecil, and retiring forthwith.

Much mystified, Cecil helped Um Yusuf to undo the bundle, and drew out of it one of the long loose gowns with square-cut neck and wide hanging sleeves, worn by Turkish ladies of the old school. It was of blue silk interwoven with silver threads, and to wear with it there was a vest or chemisette of delicate straw-coloured gauze, and a round velvet cap decorated with silver coins. The two women gazed at one another in astonishment as they unfolded the garments and smoothed them out.

"What does it mean, Um Yusuf?" asked Cecil, almost in a whisper.

"It look to me like wedding-dress, mademoiselle," responded Um Yusuf, in the same awed tones. "Perhaps you going to be married."

"That is absurd, Um Yusuf," said Cecil, with unusual sharpness. "But I won't put it on, at any rate."

Presently the negress returned, and after a glance of surprise at the neglected finery, informed Cecil that the great ladies commanded her attendance.

"What ladies?" asked Cecil.

To her amazement the woman replied—

"The Um-ul-Pasha and the Kitchuk Khanum Effendi." This was Jamileh Khanum's official title.

Cecil's spirits rose with a bound. Here, at any rate,

- were foemen worthy of her steel, which was certainly not the case with the agas, who could only answer, "Khanum Effendi's orders," to all remonstrances, and she sprang up to follow the negress with keen anticipations of a coming struggle.

"Perhaps they are come to Mosul for Azim Bey's wedding with Safieh Khanum," she whispered to Um Yusuf; but the good woman shook her head in perplexity.

"Azim Bey not to be married until he seventeen," she began, but just then their guide drew back a curtain and ushered them into the presence of the great ladies. Cecil had made up her mind what to do. The moment she observed that neither of the ladies made any reply or return to her salaam and salutation, she sat down at once without waiting to be invited, regardless of the contrast afforded by her travel-stained blue wrapper and yellow slippers to the wadded and fur-trimmed pelisse and trousers of green satin which formed the winter dress of the Um-ul-Pasha, or to Jamileh Khanum's Parisian morning-robe of petunia velvet, with its front of costly lace. The ladies sat at the upper end of the room, facing her, the Um-ul-Pasha in the seat of honour in the corner of the divan, her daughter-in-law beside her. At a respectful distance sat Mdlle. Katrina, palpitating with eagerness. To this excellent woman conspiracy was the very breath of life. She would have plotted against herself cheerfully if she could by any means have imported sufficient mystery into the proceedings, and she had been the Um-ul-Pasha's go-between with the outer world throughout her long series of plots. At her mistress's command she now set to work to interpret her words to Cecil without further parley.

"Why have you not put on the clothes I sent you, mademoiselle?" was the first question.

"Because they are not suited to my circumstances," Cecil replied at once. "I am a stranger and a prisoner, and the clothes seem to be intended for a festival."

"What has that to do with you?" asked the Um-ul-Pasha. "Do you wish to scorn my gifts, mademoiselle?"

"Certainly not, your Excellency," responded Cecil, politely. "I only wish to be sure that there are no conditions attaching to them."

"Mademoiselle, your tone is unsuitable. Know then, that now that your term of service in the household of my son, the Pasha, has expired, I have determined to provide suitably for you, and I have found you a husband, who is willing to take you on my recommendation. And let me tell you, mademoiselle, that without my recommendation you would have had little chance indeed of obtaining a husband at all."

"I am extremely grateful for the Um-ul-Pasha's kind intentions, but I must respectfully decline her offer," said Cecil.

"And why, pray?" demanded the old lady, through her interpreter. "Your betrothed husband is dead, so what obstacle is there?"

"Dr Egerton may be dead," returned Cecil, her eyes filling with tears at this rough mention of her loss, "but that does not alter my feelings towards him. My heart is his still, and I will not marry any one else."

"But we will make you," cried Jamileh Khanum.

"You ought to know, Khanum, that a British subject cannot be legally married out here except under the British flag," said Cecil, somewhat more calmly.

"Bah! who is to know or care whether the mar-

"riage is legal or not?" demanded Jamileh Khanum, contemptuously.

"There is a British vice-consul in Mosul, and I will appeal to him," said Cecil, her colour rising angrily. The affair was becoming absurdly and irritatingly melodramatic, and she found it difficult to keep her own part of the conversation to the everyday level that she felt was safest.

"You speak like a fool," said the Um-ul-Pasha. "As yet, praise be to God! our harems are sacred from the infidel. We will give out that you are a Yezidi captive, and the Frangis cannot touch you."

"That will not help you," said Cecil, as coolly as she could. "Do you think for a moment that when the bride's proxies came to demand my consent to the marriage, anything would make me give it?"

"Yes," said Jamileh Khanum. "We could force you to give it."

"Could you?" said Cecil, very quietly. "Perhaps you would like to try?"

She looked so absolutely undaunted as she sat facing them, every nerve on the stretch with excitement, a red spot burning on either cheek, that her opponents felt an uncomfortable sensation of approaching defeat. Was it possible that the Frangi woman was going to defy them after all? They had thought of her as a gentle, timid creature, amenable to the slightest pressure after the troubles she had gone through, but the reality was disappointing. The intended victim had risen to the occasion, and was ready to fight to the last, and the two ladies on the divan turned from her and began a hasty conversation, most of which was perfectly audible to Cecil. Indeed, but for the sake of the Um-ul-Pasha's dignity, which she conceived made

it derogatory to her to speak directly to the infidel, the interpreter would have been unnecessary throughout.

"What are we to do? This will spoil everything," said the Um-ul-Pasha.

"Starve her, break her spirit!" cried Jamileh Khanum.

"But there is no time," objected the Um-ul-Pasha. "Whatever we do must be done at once. Let us send for Azim Bey, and bid him devise a plan to set things right."

"Never!" cried Jamileh Khanum, fiercely. "What! shall that young Shaitan laugh at my son's beard?" This was a bold figure of speech, for little Najib Bey was barely two years old. "Let us send the Frangi woman a cup of coffee."

"Art thou mad?" cried the Um-ul-Pasha, aghast at the sinister suggestion. "Are we not yet deep enough in disgrace with my son, and shall we bring the wrath of the Balio Bey upon our heads as well? I tell thee this is our only chance. The boy has a wise head, and for the sake of his family will devise some scheme by which our credit may be saved and all set right."

"Do as thou wilt," said Jamileh Khanum; "I will have no hand in it," and she rose and swept from the room, flinging a curse at Cecil as she went. Presently the Um-ul-Pasha and Mdlla. Kaṭrina followed her out, and Cecil and Um Yusuf were left alone, waiting in breathless expectancy.

CHAPTER XXVII.

PRACTICAL JOKES.

It seemed a very long time that the two prisoners waited alone, and it was indeed long enough for the momentary excitement to pass away, and for Cecil to realise how very little she had to support her, in spite of her valiant words, beyond her innate British pluck and a determination not to be bullied. Um Yusuf was not a comforting companion. She passed the time in giving utterance to doleful prognostications, covering most of the contingencies which could reasonably be expected to occur under the circumstances, and ending up with—

“Yes, mademoiselle, this quite fixed in my mind. Not you nor I shall eat one morsel nor drink one drop more in this house.”

“Well,” said Cecil, with a half-hearted attempt to turn the affair into a joke, “if we must choose between being starved and poisoned, Um Yusuf, I think the poisoning would be less painful in the end. It would certainly be quicker.”

Um Yusuf gave a contemptuous sniff at her mistress’s flippancy, and they waited in silence, until there was a sound of hurrying footsteps in the passage. Then the

curtain was pulled aside, and Azim Bey darted in, radiant with smiles, while behind him appeared the faithful Mas'ûd, grinning from ear to ear.

"Oh, mademoiselle, my dear mademoiselle!" cried the boy, rushing to kiss Cecil's hand. "They have brought you back at last, then? But you have been ill—they have ill-treated you? Ah! they shall pay for it. But all is right now."

"Not all, Bey," said Cecil, grieved that he should so soon have forgotten the tragedy of the Kurdish hills, but he was too much excited to listen.

"Come, mademoiselle, don't stay in this wretched place. You will trust yourself in the *kajavahs* once more, if I ride by the side of the mule? There is a ridiculous formality to go through, and I want to get it over. My grandmother has promised you in marriage to a certain man, and he will not accept his dismissal from any lips but your own. That will not take long to do, will it, mademoiselle?"

"Certainly not," said Cecil, astonished at this sudden development of affairs, and smiling down at her pupil as he led her out. But at the door he stopped and looked her over with a dissatisfied face.

"Mademoiselle, your clothes are so old, so dusty. Have they taken away your other dresses?"

"I really have nothing but what I have on," said Cecil, lightly. "Our luggage seems to have gone astray. It doesn't signify much, though, does it?"

"But it does, mademoiselle," returned Azim Bey, with deep seriousness. "I cannot bear that this man should see you so poorly dressed. You have to speak to him, you know."

"Well," said Cecil, "the Um-ul-Pasha sent me a dress this morning which I refused to touch. If you like, I

will put it on, though it scarcely seems fair to wear the dress she meant for a wedding to refuse the bridegroom in. What do you think?"

"Oh, mademoiselle, it is excellent. Do go and put it on at once. I will wait, only do make haste. I am dancing with excitement."

Cecil went away smiling to the room where she had passed the night, and with Um Yusuf's help no time was lost in putting on the rejected dress. Over all came the great white sheet in which it had been wrapped, replacing the old blue wrapper, and Cecil returned to her pupil, who, if not actually dancing, was certainly fidgeting with impatience.

"At last, mademoiselle! Oh, come, come."

"But where are we going, Bey?" asked Cecil.

"To the Palace, of course, mademoiselle. Where else should we go?"

"But isn't this Mosul?" she cried. Azim Bey laughed uproariously.

"But, mademoiselle, it is Baghdad—our own beautiful Baghdad."

"But the people all talked Kurdish," gasped Cecil.

"Because you came down from the mountains with the harem of Khalil Khan, the Kurdish chief, who is to remain here as a hostage for his tribe, mademoiselle."

"But where are they now?"

"In the rooms at the other side of this house, mademoiselle. The Um-ul-Pasha arranged that you should be lodged quite alone this last night."

A flood of further questions was trembling on Cecil's lips, but the courtyard had now been reached, and the mule-litter was waiting. Cecil and Um Yusuf were helped into their accustomed seats, to carry on during the ride an incoherent conversation, marked by bursts

of enlightenment as fresh confirmations of Azim Bey's words occurred to them. Arrived at their destination, the Bey met them again, and seizing Cecil's hand as soon as she had dismounted, hurried her through rooms and passages in breathless haste.

"Oh, by the bye, mademoiselle," he said, as they entered the house, "it was the Um-ul-Pasha's special wish that I should tell you that the gentleman you are going to see is the one she meant you to marry."

"So I understood," said Cecil, much perplexed.

"Oh, well, you can believe it or not, as you like, mademoiselle."

"Bey, what do you mean?" demanded Cecil, pausing to look back and see whether Um Yusuf was following. "Why shouldn't I believe it when you told me so yourself?"

"Oh, never mind, mademoiselle, only come. It is all right now—all right," he repeated. "My heart is almost bursting, I am so happy."

"But why?" asked Cecil.

"I can't help it, mademoiselle, I scarcely know what to do. Now draw your veil close, we are coming to the *selamlık*. Dear mademoiselle," and he stopped suddenly, "you have quite forgiven me—you are sure—for *his* death?"

"Dear boy, why do you remind me of this just now?" asked Cecil, the tears rising to her eyes once more. "I have forgiven you, long ago."

"I knew it, mademoiselle, but I wanted to hear you say it again. Go into that room," and Azim Bey dashed off with something like a sob.

Sorely puzzled, Cecil advanced in the direction he indicated, and drew aside the curtain over the doorway. Through the mist of her tears she saw a gaunt,

dark-bearded man, wearing the regulation frock-coat and fez, standing with his back to her and looking out of the window.

"An Armenian!" she said to herself, perceiving at once the unwelcome suitor whom she was to put out of his misery. "Monsieur——"

The man turned round, and Cecil stood awestruck and speechless. Had that rocky grave in the mountains of Kurdistan given up its dead? She dropped the curtain, and staggered blindly across the floor with outstretched hands.

"*Charlie?*" she gasped, tremblingly.

The room was reeling with her, but strong arms caught her as she nearly fell, and the voice she had thought never to hear again was in her ears.

"Cecil, my own darling, look at me. Don't cry so dreadfully—it breaks my heart. Have I frightened you so much?"

"They told me you were dead," she murmured, when she could still the long-drawn sobs which broke from her in the stress of that first recognition.

"And they told me you were going to marry another fellow," he retorted, quickly, "but I never believed it. Still, I never thought I should see you again, my dearest girl."

"But Hanna saw you killed—at least he saw you dead."

"I don't know how he managed it," said Charlie, in his driest tones.

"Nor do I," cried Cecil, with a burst of hysterical laughter. "But you must have been wounded, *Charlie*. You could never have been thrown down that cliff without being hurt. Besides, he saw you."

"I don't know what you mean," said Charlie.

"Have you and Hanna been concocting horrors between you? Don't you believe now that I am alive?"

"But I have seen it," persisted Cecil, "over and over again."

"Oh, this is hopeless," said Charlie. "Leave it alone for the present, my darling, and let us puzzle it out afterwards. Taking it for granted that I am alive, are you glad to see me?"

"Glad? Oh, Charlie!" Cecil's tone was answer enough.

"Let me look at you, dear," she said, after a blissful pause, and raising her head from his shoulder she scanned his face. Very thin, very bright-eyed, very weather-beaten, it was the face of the old Charlie still, but there seemed to her to be in it a strength and a purpose which it had lacked in former days.

"And you, Cecil? You have been ill, I'm certain. Been crying over me, thinking I was dead, poor little girl?" and he kissed her tenderly.

"Oh, what do I signify?" she cried. "Tell me about yourself, Charlie. Where have you been?"

"In the hills, slave to an old brute of a Kurd named Ismail Khan Beg. They didn't treat me badly at first, except that they took away my own clothes and gave me some of their old ones to wear. When a Kurd has done with his things, Cecil, I can tell you they are rags and something more—ugh! Well, they got rather fond of me, because I doctored them a little, and so on; but it didn't do me much good after all, for old Ismail took it into his head to offer to adopt me as his heir, if I would become a Mohammedan and join the tribe. There was a giddy pinnacle of success for you, Cecil! but I didn't mount it, and they all

turned rusty. The less said about the last few months the better——”

“My dear brave boy,” murmured Cecil.

“Well, one day a messenger came from the Pasha demanding that I should be given up to him. It sounded rather like a death-sentence, remembering the circumstances under which I left Baghdad, but anything was better than the life I was leading, so I came away in durance vile. I was brought down here under a very strong guard, with that fiend Karalampi at the head of it. It was he who told me that lie about you, and of course I didn’t believe it, but when you cried so on seeing me I couldn’t tell what to think. Then I was put in prison here, but this morning they fetched me out and gave me fresh clothes and let me have a bath. I know now just how Joseph felt when he was taken out of prison and brought before the king, though Ahmed Khémi in an awful funk isn’t exactly regal.”

“Take care. There’s some one coming,” said Cecil, moving hastily to the window, away from Charlie.

“Who cares?” he asked, following her immediately, just as the curtain at the doorway was drawn aside, and M. Karalampi appeared, escorting Lady Haigh.

“I have the happiness of bringing about a family reunion, M. le docteur,” observed the Greek to Charlie, as Cecil and her friend rushed into each other’s arms. Charlie shrugged his shoulders. In this moment of happiness he could afford to disregard even M. Karalampi, provided he did not make himself too objectionable.

“And now, Cecil darling,” pursued Lady Haigh, when she had bestowed a sounding embrace and a burst of tears on Charlie, “come back with me.”

"But am I not to stay here?" asked Cecil in amazement.

"Not unless you wish to become an inmate of the harem for the space of your natural life," said Lady Haigh. "Why, my dear child, Christmas is over, and your engagement here is terminated. I suppose you will soon be homeward bound, but I must have you for a little while at the Residency first."

"Allow me to have the felicity of escorting Mdlla. Antaza," said M. Karalampi, as Lady Haigh turned to descend to the courtyard. He offered his arm to Cecil, but Charlie was before him.

"Thank you, but you shall not come between us again," he said, and M. Karalampi was fain to practise his chivalry on Lady Haigh.

Cecil's stay at the Residency proved to be an eventful one. Lady Haigh and Charlie put their heads together, and the results of their consultation presented themselves in the form of two incompatible propositions—namely, that it was absolutely necessary that an escort should be found for Cecil throughout her long journey back to England, but that there was no prospect that any member of the English colony would be returning home just at present. The net conclusion of these contradictory premisses was a self-evident truth, which, as Cecil said, gave the crown to the bad logic of the whole proceeding. The only thing to be done was that she and Charlie should be married at Baghdad, and consider the voyage home in the light of a honeymoon trip. To every one else this seemed a most fitting solution of the difficulty, and Cecil acquiesced in it with a submissiveness which would have astonished herself a year or two before.

"It is not fair of you to take me by surprise in this way now, Charlie, after all that has happened," she said. "My pride is broken, and I don't mind confessing that I couldn't part with you again."

This accommodating spirit was hailed as altogether satisfactory by Lady Haigh, although she took occasion in private to admonish Cecil not to make Charlie proud by letting him think that she could not do without him. This advice was supported by many apposite illustrations, but Cecil laughed in her sleeve, and contrasted Lady Haigh's preaching with her practice, for when she and Sir Dugald were separated, she could think and speak of little beside him. But having done her duty and relieved her conscience, the elder lady turned with a glad heart to the making of preparations for the wedding. Of course the ceremony was to be performed by Dr Yehudi, and Sir Dugald consented, under protest, to give away the bride.

"I disapprove of the whole affair," he said to Charlie, "and I cannot see why I should be obliged to seem to give my sanction to it. If Miss Anstruther did me the honour to ask my advice even now, I should feel bound to advise her to throw you over, but she hasn't. At any rate, since she is foolish enough to take you, I have had to give up the opinion I once held of her good sense."

"Your bark was always worse than your bite, Sir Dugald," laughed Charlie, who had had time to arrive at this conclusion now that he was no longer on an official footing with the Balio Bey. And indeed Sir Dugald gave himself infinite trouble in disentangling and setting right the complicated affairs of the pair, although when he was at home he entreated his wife

to keep those two out of his sight, for they looked so absurdly happy he could not stand it.

"You will be pleased to know," he said, coming into the Residency verandah one day after a lengthy interview with the Pasha at the Palace, "that all you have gone through is nothing but a series of practical jokes."

"Very practical jokes indeed!" said Charlie, growing rather red, while Cecil, glancing up into Sir Dugald's impenetrable eyes, saw his eyebrows twitching at the corners.

"Oh, Sir Dugald, you are joking!" she cried.

"Not at all," said Sir Dugald, sitting down in a long wicker chair and stretching himself luxuriously; "the joke is all on the side of the Pasha's household, I assure you. Egerton's leaving Baghdad was a joke of Axim Bey's; so was his capture by the Kurds. His pretended death, your imprisonment, Miss Anstruther, and the attempt to marry you off to some native, were little jokes of the Kitchuk Khanum Effendi's, got up in pure lightness of heart, just to relieve the monotony of harem existence. The Um-ul-Pasha shares in the family tastes, so she co-operated with her Excellency, and Karalampi acted as a kind of master of the revels, humouring the rest by lending his experience to make their play more real."

"I can't make out that business about the native," said Charlie, meditatively. "We are evidently meant to understand that he was a myth, and that the Um-ul-Pasha intended all along to play the part of a fairy godmother, and bring us together again. Is it so?"

"Not a bit," said Sir Dugald. "The fellow was a flesh-and-blood reality. I believe he is some relation to the Levantine woman who has done all the Um-ul-Pasha's dirty work in this business."

"Mdlle. Katrina's nephew!" cried Cecil, in mingled astonishment and disgust.

"Yes, the plan was very complete," said Sir Dugald. "And it was splendidly managed!" he cried, with the admiration of an accomplished artist for the masterpiece of a fellow-craftsman. "The way all the parts dovetail into one another is so good. Why, if it had not been for that utterly unexpected letter from Mrs Howard White, we might never have been the wiser! Just think of it, Miss Anstruther. There was Egerton up in the mountains, unable to escape or to communicate with me. There were you at Sardiyeh, miles away from Egerton in reality, and practically much more, since your gaolers were Turks and his Kurds. Still, you would have been pretty sure to have made inquiries and discovered where he was, and to have found some way of communicating with him, as long as you thought he was alive, so you had to believe him dead. That, again, was excellently done. To dress up some dead body in Egerton's clothes, pitch it over the cliff, and show it to Hanna as his master's, was very good, but it was still better to let him escape and tell his tale, and best of all to secure him and put him in safe keeping as soon as it was done. That disposed of both of you, besides working off Karalampi's little grudges. He felt quite safe, for he had Azim Bey's authority for a good deal, and he knew that he would not dare to say anything about it."

"But what was the good of it all?" said Charlie. "It seems rather aimless—so much trouble without any very important result."

"Ah, you forget the part of the plot which failed," said Sir Dugald, quickly. "It may be rather lowering to your self-esteem, but you must remember that you

two Europeans were not the chief persons aimed at. The Um-ul-Pasha and the Kitchuk Khanum Effendi had their end in view, and that was to get rid of Azim Bey; to get rid of you and Miss Anstruther was only a means of attaining that end. Everything went well as far as that. You were out of the way, and that gave them the opportunity of keeping Miss Anstruther out of the way too. Azim Bey was left unprotected. Then came the unlooked-for blow which spoiled the scheme—the Pasha's leaving Karalampi behind with the Mutesalim. The Kitchuk Khanum Effendi completed the ruin of the plot, and when once we had had Mrs White's letter, and begun to make inquiries, they had to patch things up as best they could. Miss Anstruther was to be married off and taken out of the way; and as for you, Egerton, I think you would have disappeared mysteriously as soon as you set foot outside the Palace, which would have saved them a good deal of trouble."

"And you are really going to let them carry it all off as a joke?" asked Cecil, indignantly.

"Well," said Sir Dugald, "I have pointed out to the Pasha the fact that the peculiar sense of humour inherent in his family is inconveniently strong and must be checked, and he has promised to see to it."

"But what does it all mean?" inquired Cecil, in bewilderment.

"It simply means that the Pasha is bound to hush the matter up at any cost, and that this is the only way in which he can make a show of accounting for the circumstances. Of course he has to pay for it, but he prefers that to embroiling himself with Tahir Pasha, the Khanum Effendi's father, or with the Hajar, and creating a fearful scandal in the city. I have made

sure, Miss Anstruther, that your salary is not to be docked on account of your alleged illness, and you are to receive the *bakhshish* agreed upon from the beginning. Your maid, and Egerton and his servant, are all to receive compensation, of course on the understood condition that they hold their tongues about what has taken place."

"But is the Pasha to pay it all?" asked Cecil.
"Surely that isn't fair?"

"It is not poetical justice, I grant you, especially since Karalampi retires to his native Smyrna with a handsome sum of hush-money in his pocket. But it puts it in a better light when you consider that if the Pasha had never employed Karalampi, he would never have had to pay. Or, to go back to first principles, it would have been the same if he had been content with one wife, or even with having had three, and had not married the Khanum Effendi, or if, having married her, he had kept her in better order. As for her, she has done for her son's chance of inheriting any but a very small share of his father's property, and brought herself very near a divorce, and that ought to keep her quiet for the future. Then she and her mother-in-law have quarrelled violently, and the Um-ul-Pasha has cursed Najib Bey, and taken Azim Bey into favour, which is also satisfactory. By the bye, that pupil of yours is a queer little specimen, Miss Anstruther."

"He is very happy just now in having realised an old ambition," said Cecil, laughing. "He has been both the villain and the *deus ex machina* of the story."

"Well, there's no accounting for tastes," said Sir Dugald, sententiously. "Ambitions are queer things. Egerton's is to set things right generally, I believe. I hope you realise, Miss Anstruther, that you are

in for a hornets' nest at home? Egerton will go about hunting up abuses and attacking vested interests until you are universally hated, and even think with envy of us sweltering out here. Still, better at home than in Baghdad. There may be a niche for faddists in England, but in the East we want men who can pull together."

"And in your view that covers a multitude of sins?" said Cecil. "No, Sir Dugald, I am not going to begin an argument. I know that when you and I argue it only leads to our each being more firmly convinced of the truth of our respective opinions than before. But I am sorry, for one thing, that we are going to live at home. I used to like to think that we might settle down here, and Charlie could start a medical mission to help Dr Yehudi's work."

"Poor old Yehudi! I think I should have been obliged to interfere to protect him," said Sir Dugald. "He would have had the mob pulling the Mission-house about his ears in a week. No; for the sake of the Mission, and of the unoffending missionaries, I am sure we may be thankful that Egerton's past record effectually prevents his settling in Baghdad."

"Well," said Cecil, with a little sigh, "I think I am learning not to try and plan my life beforehand, but to take it as it comes. Nothing has ever happened yet as I have expected it."

"I should not have suspected you of being a disenchanted cynic," said Sir Dugald, as he rose, but Cecil looked up at him in surprise.

"But I am not complaining," she said. "What I meant was that I thought I was beginning to see how much better it was that it should be so, because we can't tell what is before us. Why, when we left

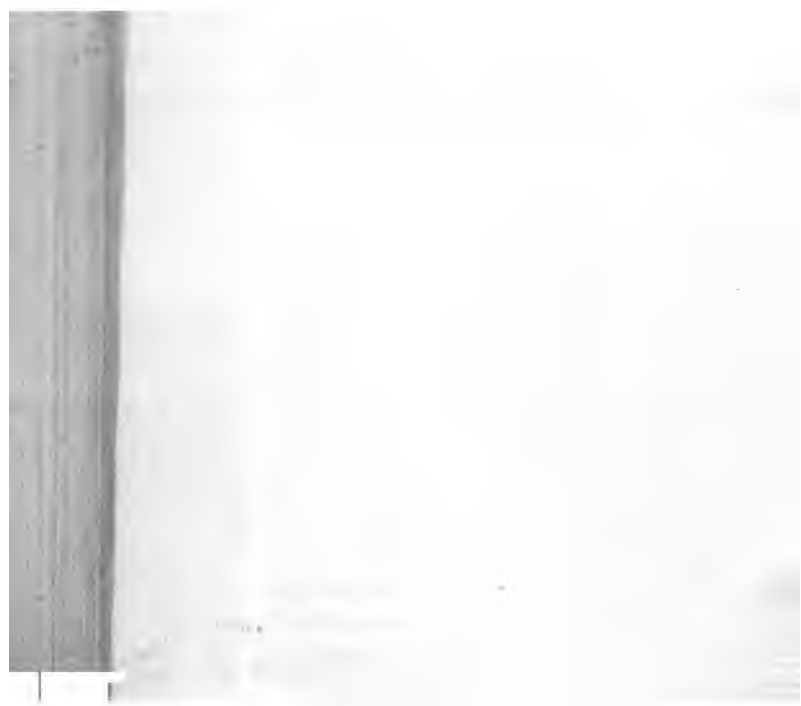
Sardiyeh, I felt so miserable that I told Um Yusuf that I should like to stay there always. She said that was only foolishness, but it was what I really felt, and just think what I should have missed if I had been able to do as I liked! And at the very beginning, too, before I came out here at all, if my life had been as I planned it, I should have been teaching the children at home still, and I should never have left England—nor met Charlie.”

“And that would have been a loss?” asked Sir Dugald.

Cecil gave him a glance of pity and reproach.

“A very great loss,” she said.

THE END.



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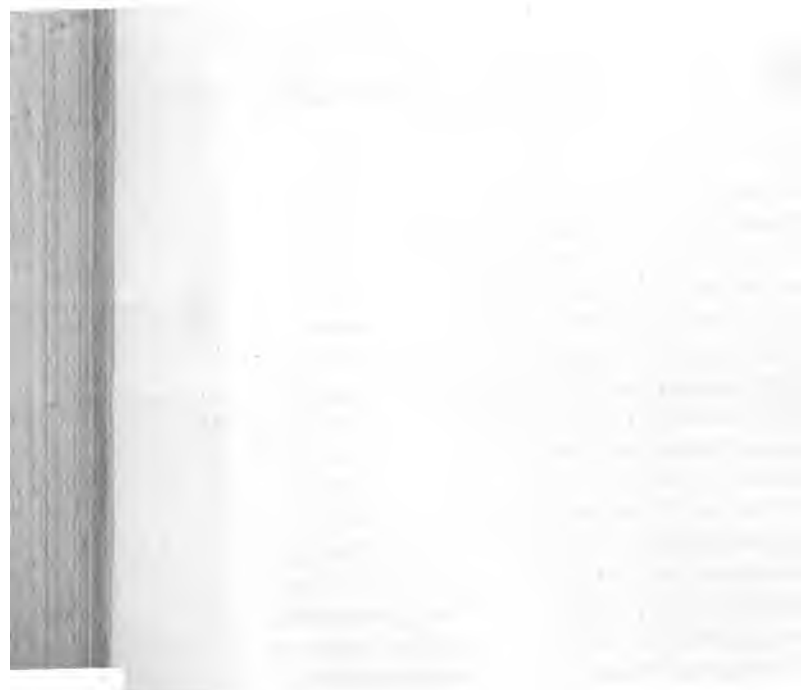
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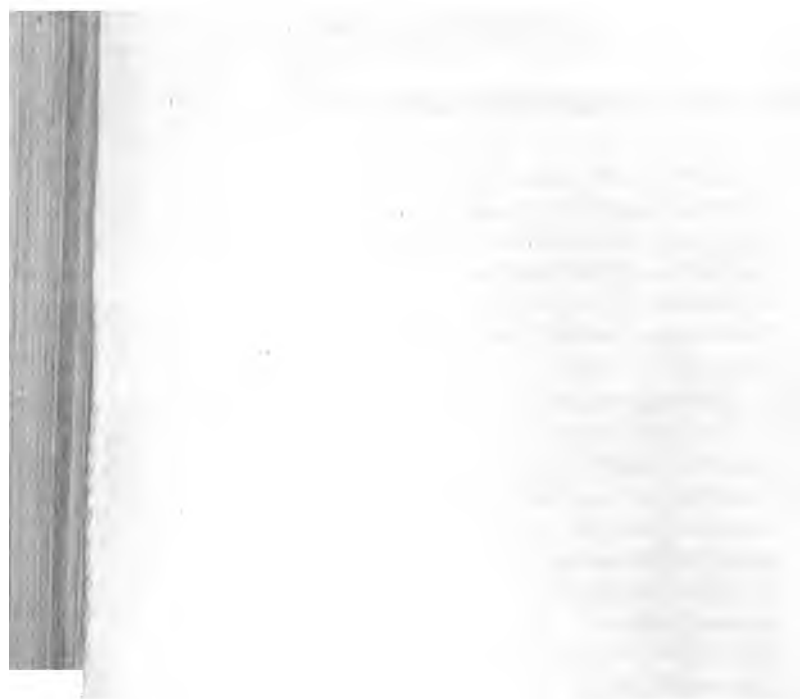
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